

# ISLINGTON *news*

*The Journal of the Islington Society incorporating FOIL folio*

## Hung council restores excitement to local politics

Memories of 1981, when three political groupings voted down each other's proposals, were revived in February when the outcome of the budget setting Council meeting was once again uncertain before the event. On this occasion, the Council comprised 23 Liberal Democrats, 23 Labour councillors, 1 Green Party member and an independent liberal, the ruling party holding the casting vote in the person of the Mayor.

### Refreshed and relaxed

Council leader James Kempton has established a reputation for a more relaxed style than his predecessor, so perhaps critics took the view that he was less in need than most of a holiday taken just before the meeting. He gave a confident presentation, using few notes, of the ruling group's plan for a 1.8% rise in Council tax, a plan which had been revised after talks with the Green Party member of whose support they were now confident.

### Free school meals

The Labour group alternative budget raised Council tax by 2.5% for which there would be a rebate to pensioners, a reduction in councillors allowances, and the provision of free school meals to all children in Islington primary schools from September. This proposal, moved by Cllr. Catherine West, was supported by the independent Liberal to give it 24 votes. The Green Party councillor was unable to support either proposal, and with one Liberal absent through illness the ruling group had only 22 votes. The pensioners rebate and reduction in councillor allowances are enormously popular and there is much support for free school meals despite the counter-argument that it is handing benefit to the likes of Boris Johnson and Lord Adonis. These people do not pay for pencils and paper or indeed anything considered essential to their children's schooling.

Like the Labour government policy of free buses for pensioners, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. If the food is not up to scratch the nutritional and educational benefits (the latter derived from improved attention span) will be less, just as the free bus policy is dependent on bus services being provided.

### Mayor making takes added spice

The vote does not end Liberal control of the

council, since there is no majority of councillors (25+ out of 48) for change. The Mayorality therefore continues to be key to the balance of power and the independent Liberal made clear his support for current Deputy Mayor Anna Berent shortly after the budget vote. With the school meals in particular, there are matters of detail to be worked out and how a ruling group implements a plan it voted against will be a test of democracy.

### Kempton resigns

A month later James Kempton announced his resignation as leader. "My decision was triggered by personal factors. I will be 50 next year, and will have served on the council for 16 years, including three years as council Leader and more than six years as Deputy Leader.

"This has been one of the best, most rewarding and personally stretching experiences of my life. I will always feel deeply privileged to have had the opportunity to serve the people of this great borough as council leader. This has not been an easy decision to make, but I know it is the right one for me and my partner."

### No contest

With support from the independent liberal, and no opposition within the Liberal Democrat group, Cllr. Terry Stacy was elected leader at the subsequent (annual) council meeting, which also confirmed Society member Anna Berent as Mayor for 2009/10. However, the Liberal Democrats did not win all the votes, losing seats on the Cripplegate Foundation and the Angel Town Centre Forum, and conceding the chair of the Overview Committee to the independent liberal. The following week, the chair of the north area planning committee passed to the Green Party councillor when one of the Liberal Democrats arrived late.

## Lisa Memorial walk held in glorious weather

The 175th anniversary of the Tolpuddle Martyrs could not have been a better day on which to walk the streets of King's Cross and the Cally in memory of Lisa Pontecorvo.

Our starting point was the former site of the jewellers Bravingtons whose name lives on in the Lane created to link what is now called the Regent Quarter. Opposite on Pentonville Road we were able to witness the lighthouse block which awaits redevelopment. It was disappointing that little effort had been made to protect the building from the elements or the pigeons. There is a proposal before Camden Council for a redevelopment which preserves the lighthouse but ruins the roovescape with its network of chimneys.

We were pleased that the industrial heritage of many of the buildings inside Regent Quarter remains apparent with the preservation of ironworks detailing the original occupant. On to the north of the site, and a last chance to see the steady stream of commuters utilising the hidden entrance to King's Cross station at the north end of platform 1. Three days later it was closed "to create a better railway". Better for whom? The train operators perhaps, but

not residents of Islington.

Our next landmark was Caledonian Road, with its much improved shop fronts and further up the hill, reduced encroachment on to the pavement. The walk then turned into Bridgeman Road past the West Library, survivor of yet another campaign for closure in 1993, and past Lisa's former home to the Matilda Street chimney which is now in the privately maintained Bramwell Mews. We discovered that it had recently suffered some damage in the extreme cold weather (as did a car beneath it) but that repairs had been effected speedily. Everyone agreed that the chimney is a far more attractive feature than the expensive and ten a penny water features which capture the more limited imagination of developers elsewhere.

The final point on the walk was Edward Square and the mural of the Tolpuddle Martyrs featuring Lisa at the head. The walk lasted around two hours and after a short rest in the Square proceeded to the Screen on the Green where the film "Comrades" was being shown as yet another part of the celebration of the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

## Jim Lagden

Another figure familiar to many in the Society. Godfrey James Lagden passed away in March and his funeral took place on Ascension Day. Any member desirous of a more speedy committal without close family is strongly advised to make a will. For all that, there was a healthy attendance, including Flint who was Jim's guide dog for the last five years as his sight declined.

We learned that Jim had trained as an actuary and been a partner in a renowned actuarial firm. His desire to improve the living environment for all took him to less remunerative but more rewarding work, first at Hammersmith and Fulham and then in Islington. For a few months he was part

of the Council's Brighter Islington team, but his most memorable contribution to the Borough was through Friends of the Museum. For 24 years he campaigned for there to be a museum in Islington, and with the establishment of a permanent home at Finsbury Library his efforts were at last rewarded.

Jim also organised the Angel Canal Festival for many years and was a campaigner for the North London line, forming another group called Funnel for this purpose. He used the line from his Hampstead home to Islington until miffed by Roger Freeman transferring his station into zone 3: An illogical decision reversed by Ken Livingstone long after Jim had his freedom pass.

## Ryan Kemp

Although not a Society member, Ryan Kemp was extremely active in his local community and his death at the early age of 59 should not go unmarked. Ryan chaired the Cally Neighbourhood Forum during the battle over the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. He was a community representative on Friends of Regent's Canal, the King's Cross Development Forum and the Caledonian Safer Neighbourhoods Panel, amongst others. He regularly attended public meetings of the West area planning committee. He was also active in his Trade Union (now UCU) and the Labour Party, which he combined with numerous outside interests.

## Economic downturn saves Sobell Centre

*If ever proof were needed that every cloud has a silver lining, it surely came when the Council abandoned its plan wantonly to destroy the gift of Sir Michael Sobell. James Dunnett, a leading campaigner in the fight to save this building, reports.*

We have entered what can only be called an 'orgy of killing' in respect of buildings from the 1950s, '60s and '70s. There may be sound financial, responsible, and even humanitarian reasons for their demolition, but it is also often fuelled by a lack of understanding of them, a lack of appreciation of their aesthetics and the ideas behind them, and hence a widespread dislike of them. The 'Prince Charles' approach to architecture, covert or overt, is pervasive. Thus we often find in official 'public consultation' documents, amongst the reasons for proposing the destruction or transformation of such buildings, a reference to their unpleasantness. For example Islington Council's 2008 consultation leaflet about the Sobell Centre, the major sports/leisure facility on Hornsey Road designed by Bill Laming of Richard Seifert and Partners (architects of listed Centre Point), which opened in 1973, says 'the building and surrounding area could be made much more attractive. The building is environmentally unfriendly...with lots of wasted space. The wider site, including Kinloch Park, is unattractive...'

In fact some of the ideas that influenced the design of buildings during that period ought to make them popular today. Many were influenced by the ideal of the 'green city' - the feeling that buildings should no longer be lined up along the backs of pavements facing directly onto streets made noisy and dangerous by motorised traffic, but should be more freely dispersed about green space to improve people's outlook, peace, and daylight levels. An excellent example of this in the Borough is the popular Highbury Quadrant housing estate - or less obviously the post-war part of the Barnsbury Estate, even though the Council has increasingly allowed the green space to be built over. This is because the ideal of the green city is not understood and such green spaces are not officially valued - indeed they are positively condemned in the Council's urban design guide. In this context it is not surprising that the green space surrounding the Sobell Centre should be regarded simply as 'unattractive' and 'waste', fit only for re-development. Architecture like the Sobell's - designed with a setting of this kind in mind - is equally condemned.

But to many, the architecture of the Sobell

is admirable and to some the open space around it equally so. The building was a gift to the Borough by Sir Michael Sobell, a native-born electrical goods manufacturer, and by his design consultants, who charged nothing for their fees, via the Variety Club of Great Britain. The objective was to give local youth in a deprived part of the Borough something 'to keep them off the streets', and adults were originally not admitted. Various Boroughs were invited to bid for the facility with the quality of site they were prepared to offer, and Islington won with the generous site on Hornsey Road, made larger by the re-alignment of Tollington Road to swing southwards. The resulting curved shape of site appears to have inspired Laming's distinctive plan. His immense rectangular central sports hall (capable of accommodating 4 five-a-side football pitches or 16 badminton courts), is enclosed like the keep of a castle by two interlocking curved outer walls, the space between being filled with ancillary sports facilities such as changing rooms, café, squash courts, gyms, an ice rink. (there was no swimming pool because Hornsey Road Baths were nearby). The very solid-looking ribbed and bush-hammered outer walls, with few windows and a huge arched entrance perhaps add to the castle analogy, whilst responding in plan to the curved edge of the site. Once into the Great Hall of the castle, all is space and light - there is a generous strip of clerestory glazing and a 'minstrel's gallery' all round which, together with the great height and the impressive steel roof trusses above, give a feeling of elation and desire for sport much commented on by users. Laming has confirmed that a primary objective of his design externally was to maximise the open space, which provides such an attractive forecourt to his 'castle': he would have liked to push the building even further back on the site but the planners insisted on a large amount of parking there (which they now wish to remove). He understood the 'green city' ideal of his time.

Bounded by the curved plan form of the Sobell Centre and alignment of Tollington Road, well planted with a mixture of forest and flowering trees which have had 35 years to mature, with pleasant gently-contoured grassed surfaces, this



green space provides an invaluable 'peace zone' between the Centre and the heavily-trafficked roads around. It is occasionally frequented by families to picnic and also by 'winos'. But essentially it is used by being walked through, by being looked at, by the relief its greenness gives to that part of the Borough, by the very fact that there is no vigorous activity going on in it constantly, by the calm approach it offers to the sports centre in preparation for the vigorous activity inside. This is the kind of relief that I believe to be essential to make urban life tolerable. That some elements of society seen as less desirable also use such spaces cannot mean that they should be denied to everyone else. There are other ways to approach that question.

After 35 years of intensive use, many of the sports surfaces and many of the mechanical and electrical services in the Sobell Centre inevitably need renewal. At the same time, having closed the Hornsey Road Baths and sold them off for

re-development, the Council has come to the conclusion (despite a commissioned report to the contrary) that a swimming complex is needed in the area after all. In the spacious Sobell site, as in school playgrounds elsewhere, was seen an opportunity to fund new buildings by selling development rights for housing. In the case of the Sobell, the new facility was to include a larger ice rink and swimming pools, but generally to be substantially smaller in volume even with the 'maximum redevelopment' option. Above and around it were to be 270 housing units. Floorspace on the site would triple. This was 'Option 4', the maximum redevelopment option for which the Council's consultation exercise was held to have found public support (although even for an architect like myself it was difficult to understand the difference between the various options from the diagrams in the consultation leaflet). This 'maximum option' also meant 'minimum expenditure' for the Council: for a total expenditure



of about £90 million, the Council was to spend only £10 million, whereas for the only 'refurbishment option' studied, without 'development gains', it would have to spend £45 million - somehow 50% more even than for a wholly-new 'Leisure Centre' without any housing at all! This refurbishment option involved converting more than half of the present magnificent Sports Hall (used for world-class tournaments and Olympic training) into a swimming complex and then applying to the entire building the costs per square foot of the complete interior reconstruction of the listed Commonwealth Pool in Edinburgh (being carried out by the same architects).

The rebuilding option, which the Council has fortunately now put on the 'back burner' for the time being, was an all-or-nothing solution, with no flexibility. The existing Centre would have had to be demolished completely and there would then be a gap of probably three years during which there

would be no sporting facilities for all its users. When the bottom dropped out of the property market the scheme became unviable because the 'development gains' expected from the new housing were no longer available. It was suddenly realised that rather than spending £45 million on 'refurbishing' the existing building it was possible to spend £1.7 million repairing it, with new plant for the ice rink, a new sports floor for the Hall and an overhaul for the roof. a process that could probably go on indefinitely, as money allows. My own plan showed that a swimming complex with the desired facilities could in principle be built on part of the site currently used for parking now judged by the Council redundant, without encroaching on the existing green space or demolishing the existing building, and with a housing tower of similar bulk to those on the Harvist Estate adjacent to fund it. This development could be carried out once the housing market has revived, whilst allowing repair of the

existing building to proceed now with funds already set aside.

This tower would act as a beacon for the Centre visible from up and down Hornsey Road and would be a vertical element with a dramatic relationship to the horizontal mass of the Leisure Centre alongside. This would be not unlike (but better because more spacious) the relationship between the new 17-storey housing block and pool complex at Swiss Cottage in Camden designed by Terry Farrell - a much-opposed development which involved the demolition of Basil Spence's former excellent pools and which has perhaps in other ways been a model for Islington Council. With the scheme I have proposed, the amount of housing provided and expenditure required by the Council would not be very different to those of 'Option 1' in their consultation exercise, but the volume of Leisure Centre and effective open space would be about 50% greater.

Let us hope the Council's plan is shelved for good. It was a crude design, barely worked out and having no relationship to the curved outline of the site. The housing would have been depressing and monolithic - similar to that recently completed on Hornsey Street as part of the spin-off from the

Emirates Stadium, where there is scarcely a stick of green and, for many, little light. The Council's claim that their re-development would increase the amount of open space was fallacious: by moving all the buildings nearer to Tollington Street and Hornsey Road, the open space there would be reduced to narrow strips between buildings, or between buildings and roads, of no use at all, whilst the 'gain' was one of designation: it could be achieved today by grassing the parking over, without any redevelopment whatsoever! Essentially, the footprint of the proposed buildings was to be significantly larger than the present (despite a smaller Leisure Centre on more levels), and the spaces around them of much less value.

Credit has to be given to the Green Party as the only political group clearly to oppose the Council's plan. They organised a petition against it which, alongside a similar petition organised by the elected Sobell Users' Representative Barry Hill, attracted many thousands of signatures - many thousands more than responded to the Council's confusing consultation. Let us hope the Credit Crunch gives pause for thought on other such destructive schemes.

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## Schmelz, 194-195, Upper St. & Dan Davies, 196-197, Upper St.

*Number four in our series on bygone shops in Islington*

Schmelz was for over fifty years a ladies hairdresser and on the fascia of the shop they also listed cosmetics and toilet requisites and operated from two combined shops at 194-195, Upper Street which can be seen in the centre of this 1978 photograph. Schmelz

was once a fashionable shop with a much admired leaded glass upper part to their front display window which can still be seen today.

This shopping parade in 1978 consisted of old established shops run mainly by elderly people but this was all to change when Mrs. Schmelz no longer able to run the shop retired and the shop became the first of several Gill Wing shops which would occupy this shopping parade in the future.

Dan Davies was a traditional tailor and for over fifty years operated from two combined shops at

196-197, Upper Street which were in the tall building in the photograph to the right of Schmelz. My landlord in the 1970's was friendly with both Mrs. Schram and Dan Davies and I remember him telling me that when the Dutch Royal Family visited this country they stayed in accommodation above Dan Davies shop. When in residence they would fly the Dutch flag from the large flagpole fixed to the front of the building. The bottom of the flagpole can be seen between the four windows at third floor level at the top of the photo.

The flagpole can still be seen today and is now painted white. Dan Davies left in 1986 and a boutique called Yab Yum Blues opened in these premises and more recently it has become Sefton clothes shop. SW

[photograph by permission of Islington Local History Centre appears on page 8]

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## V.A.T. campaign gathers pace

*Proposals to demolish various well loved public sector buildings (Finsbury Health Centre, Sobell Sports Centre, Ashmount School) in favour of new build prompted our chairman to contact M.P. Emily Thornberry on the issue of V.A.T. It is charged on refurbishment, but not on new build.*

Emily Thornberry's reply was most encouraging. Along with Jeremy Corbyn and 92 others from all three parties, she has signed an early day motion calling for the V.A.T. rate on repairs and maintenance to existing buildings to be reduced to 5%. This is the lowest rate allowed once V.A.T. has been levied and is in line with the wishes of the Federation of Master Builders.

Emily also said that she had written separately to the Chancellor on the matter, and subsequently wrote with news of a reply from Stephen Timms, Treasury Minister and M.P. in Newham. This reply reviews the areas in which the Treasury has reduced V.A.T. since 1997, linked by an over-riding policy of having the greatest effect on the regeneration and renewal of existing housing stock, and to support environmental objectives.

He concludes that the government is keeping these matters very much under review, and he links the review to the current Green Paper on Housing, "Homes for the Future: more affordable, more sustainable." The government is exploring additional targeted and cost-effective V.A.T. measures.

Heritage Link has been a consistent voice for a level playing field where V.A.T. on building work is concerned. Its March newsletter reported the following two items.

### Private dwellings survive ruins of VAT decision

There was disappointment at the European Finance Ministers' decision over VAT at the ECOFIN Council on 10 March. But their decision still gives the UK government scope to stimulate the construction industry through reducing VAT on the repair and renovation to private dwellings. For the first time in twelve years a breakthrough in the straitjacket of the VAT regime offered the prospect of permanently reduced rates for specific services and where they did not affect the internal market.

UK and European coalitions of heritage and construction bodies lobbied hard for unanimous agreement to reduce VAT permanently from 17.5% to 5% for the list of specified services to include the renovation and repair transformation maintenance

and cleaning of places of worship, cultural heritage and historic monuments and for the renovation, repair, transformation, maintenance and cleaning of housing.

The final shortlist agreed included only minor repairs to bicycles and shoes with services such as window cleaning, domestic care, hairdressing and restaurants. The agreement stipulates that the reduced rate will not apply to the other areas proposed last summer, including the heritage element. Member States will however be able to opt for a reduction of VAT on the renovation and repair of private dwellings as before, but on a permanent basis (see [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/106576.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/106576.pdf))

So although less than ideal the possibility of permanently reducing VAT to 5% on the repair and renovation of private dwellings is still a very significant development. Almost 70% of total dwelling stock in England is owner occupied and 43.4% was built before 1945. Heritage Link, leading the sectoral lobby Heritage at the Heart of Communities, believes that the dynamic effect of a VAT reduction would more than compensate in terms of jobs created and welfare benefits saved and is requesting a meeting with Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Timms to discuss this issue and other incentives for investment in heritage.

### VAT and Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

In 2001, the UK government introduced the listed places of worship grant scheme to offset VAT. In 2007, David Lammy as Minister for Culture confirmed to Heritage Link that this was an interim scheme specifically tied to the Government's longer term aim to secure agreement in Europe that would allow a reduced rate of VAT to be levied on the repair and maintenance of church buildings, 'The Government believes that listed places of worship justify a special case because of their contribution to the spiritual and heritage of their communities', he wrote.

The Scheme (see <http://www.lpwscheme.org.uk/>) is due to continue until the end of March 2011. What

happens after that is of concern to Heritage Link's [placesofworship@heritagelink](mailto:placesofworship@heritagelink) group as the grants have proved increasingly valuable to hard pressed congregations. Payments made from 2001 to the end of February 2009 amount to £87.5m, of which £70.6m was claimed in England, £4.1m in Northern Ireland, £8.2m in Scotland and £4.5m in Wales. All faiths can claim VAT back on eligible costs that now include professional fees.

Placesofworship@heritagelink Chair Crispin Truman said 'The Listed Places of Worship Grants

Scheme has made a huge difference to local communities and volunteers in keeping their important, historic churches, chapels and other places of worship going on behalf of us all. The Scheme's contribution of almost £1m a month to thousands of communities across the country brings at least four times that in investment in craft skills, jobs and facilities. We will be writing to the Prime Minister in the strongest possible terms to retain this invaluable scheme after 2011'.

185-197 Upper Street in the early 1970s: photo courtesy of Islington Local History Centre





## Third runway at Heathrow

The Spring issue of *news Forum*, newsletter of the London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies, has as its major theme the threats to the environment posed by the planned third runway at Heathrow and the continuing failure to restrict pollution from motor vehicles. On both counts the government appears to be on a collision course with its undertakings to the EU.

### Every promise made by government has been broken.

- When Terminal 4 was approved in 1978, the Inquiry Inspector recommended a cap on the number of flights at 275,000 a year.

- In February 1980 Aviation Minister, Lord Trefargne announced in the House of Lords that there should be no further major expansion at Heathrow: "The Government concludes that the idea of a fifth terminal at Heathrow and a second runway at Gatwick should not be pursued. This effectively limits expansion at these airports."

- The cap was never enforced. By the time T4 was opened there were over 300,000 flights.

- In 1999 BAA said in a letter to residents: "We do not want, nor shall we seek, an additional runway."

- Terminal 5 was approved in 2001 despite that 1980 assurance. The planning inspector stated that a third runway would be "totally unacceptable". BAA agreed.

- But the Department of Transport was already planning for 700,000 flights, a third runway and a sixth terminal which they proposed in the 2003 aviation White Paper

- It pledged this would only go ahead if there were "no net increase" to the size of the area around Heathrow affected by 57 decibels of aircraft noise, the level deemed to mark "the onset of significant community annoyance".

- But for 3 years civil servants have been working out ways round the noise and pollution limits that a third runway will break, even to the extent of considering applying to Brussels for a five-year exemption from the European Union limits on air pollution

- 2009 the third runway and sixth terminal given the go-ahead

### Parliamentary debate in January

The Chairman wrote to Emily Thornberry, one of our two M.P.s following the parliamentary debate on Heathrow at the end of January. In reply, she affirmed her comments in the debate, that she is opposed to creating extra air capacity. She defended the government's record on addressing climate change, citing the Climate Change Act which requires the UK to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. This leaves only 20% of the carbon we currently use and Emily affirmed that it would be a mistake to use it all for aviation.

She did not support the motion put forward by the Conservatives because it was not an anti-expansion motion. It was put forward at a time when the Conservative Mayor is proposing a four runway airport in the Thames estuary and the shadow transport secretary stated in the debate that

she would not rule out expansion elsewhere in the south-east.

It remains the case that within all parties is a range of views. Steve Norris made it clear when addressing the London Better Transport for the Future (T2000) AGM that he disagrees with Boris Johnson on this matter. David Cameron's opposition to Heathrow expansion has put him under pressure from the business lobby which is overinfluenced by BAA, just as Gordon Brown's support for expansion is opposed by most London Labour MPs including Jeremy Corbyn. Unfortunately, the former West London Labour MP Lord Soley is a leading advocate of Heathrow expansion. More unfortunately still, most of the opposition to Heathrow expansion comes from those in opposition or out of government.

## Home sharing - A double benefit?

*The Society had some success with its campaign twenty years ago for homes above shops. However, a mismatch between supply, demand and use persists. In this article, Frances Baskerville examines how matters stand to-day.*

The 2001 census, from the office of National statistics, listed the total population of Islington at 175,797 - the bulk of which were then aged between 24 - 35 and with only 4109 of them being over 80 years old. But where does everyone live - how can there be enough space for all these people?

In 1800 the population of London stood at around one million. The number swells to 4.5 million by 1880, but one hundred and thirty years later the figure for 32 London boroughs and the City of London is approximately 7,700,000. Taking the EU's notion of the 'Larger Urban Zone' which was aimed at making a meaningful comparison between the demographics of major cities in Europe, London is now roughly at 11,917,000.

Given the above statistics - all the more amazing is the certain sight of empty houses and buildings when out and about in London. Travelling to work, I see many, many different kinds of unoccupied houses and frontages. There are premises with the upper floors empty, whole rows of disused shops and some beautiful period properties left standing empty. These might well be situated next to housing with multiple occupancy, families on top of one another just as in past times, when overcrowding caused ill health and poor living conditions.

So, where are all the thousands of people living that we see thronging around our borough? Islington has every kind of housing imaginable. There is considerable council housing, not only on the purpose built estates but also within our fine period properties. In the early 80's our Council owned more than 56% of the housing in Islington. That figure has dropped noticeably since private housing schemes and the Right to Buy came into force.

Lucky to be an owner - my home was once part of the council's portfolio and, it is with no small degree of regret that I find myself poised to uproot myself. Having returned to my birthplace of North London (and my workplace during the 70's), I've come to love Islington over the last few years, warts and all. But, I just can't live in this tiny space any more - however lucky it is to have a courtyard garden

with abundant birdlife and very nice neighbours.

The estate agent sounded shocked when I said I fully expected them to make a sale over the next few weeks. Why wouldn't they, when they succinctly pointed out that there was hardly a one bedroom flat to be had in Islington, especially near to the Green in a 'prime' position?

But - where to go? Most likely, it's going to be impossible to find a home that meets my 'space' requirements within my price range.

Returning to the empty property question two sites caught my eye on the Internet. 'The Empty Homes Agency' <http://www.emptyhomes.com> which is an independent campaigning charity, existing to highlight the waste of empty property in England and working with others to devise and promote solutions to bring empty property back into use. 'The North London Empty Property Initiative' <http://www.northlondonemptyproperties.co.uk/> where I read that there are approximately 8,000 properties across Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Islington and Westminster that have been empty for at least six months and that they aim to reduce the number of long-term empty private properties in North London. This is such a good scheme to hear about, especially when the website also states that there are currently 68,500 households in 'housing need' and another 5% living in overcrowded conditions across the same six boroughs. An excellent solution for those eligible for council assistance but no solution for those in my position.

So why the headline 'Home sharing - A double benefit?' It's the headline that Jane Adler used for an article she wrote in the Chicago Tribune May 23rd back in 2004. She wrote:

'Sharing is polite, but sharing your home is much more than a social courtesy. It's also a concept that's growing in popularity with people because it allows them to stretch their housing dollars.

Home sharing is an alternative housing arrangement that matches a person who needs housing with a person who has room to spare. The arrangement typically involves a person with a house, who could

use extra income and/or help around the house. The person shares with someone who can't find affordable housing.'

The article goes on to talk about finding suitable people and the kind of screening required, the benefits all round, and the expanding American system of home-sharing programs which are operated by - the social services agencies. So once again, candidates would come from this sector rather than the private sector.

For a person, such as myself, who has a certain amount invested in a small property, but not enough equity to upsize, there is no solution other than to move away from their beloved but expensive area - and likely, out of London. It seems impossible to find a home that meets my 'space' requirements

that is within my price range. Mine's a 'solve it yourself situation' with no recourse of turning to the state for a housing solution. It doesn't seem such an outrageous idea to me, to stay in the locale but I guess my time is numbered and I will become one of the transient population moving through Islington at a rate of knots. That is, unless perhaps the concept of either filling the empty properties from the private sector is accelerated or, the idea of home sharing takes off here as it has in the USA. I don't see why it couldn't. There are still many houses here in our squares and conservation areas that remain intact, some probably rather large, rambling and some, maybe, with just a single occupant.

## Story of London - celebrating the capital's past, present and future

The Story of London, taking place this June, is a festival celebrating the capital's past, present and future. Organised by the Mayor of London, the celebration will feature a range of events that will take place across the city featuring London life from its ancient origins to the present day. The festival coincides with 15 years of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and to mark both occasions, the HLF is making available small grants of between £3,000 and £10,000 to support projects that help local organisations, communities and voluntary groups to share their London stories with a much wider audience.

## Heritage Lottery Fund marks 15 years funding heritage in the capital

Heritage and community groups in boroughs across the capital have been awarded over £200,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to tell their own stories as part of the Mayor Boris Johnson's Story of London of London festival, which takes place throughout the month of June. Twenty four organisations are to benefit, enabling them to create a range of projects that help chronicle the city and its people, from East End's Pearly Queens, the West End's theatre land, 19th century life around Fleet Street, the history of London Town in song, to tales from members of communities throughout the capital, including those who grew up in poverty and others who were shut away for most of their lives in mental institutions.

The awards celebrate the 15th Anniversary of the National Lottery and the Heritage Lottery Fund. They form part of HLF's support for the Story of London, which is organised by the Greater London Authority, in partnership with a host of other organisations. The month-long festival will celebrate

the capital's past, present and future, with a wide ranging programme of activities across the city that illustrate as well as celebrate London life from its ancient origins to the present day. For more information visit this web site:

<http://www.hlf.org.uk/English/MediaCentre/Archive/Fifteen+years+of+funding+London+heritage.htm>

### Improving conservation areas

English Heritage has sent a questionnaire to all local authorities in England asking about the state of their conservation areas: are they in good health? What needs to be done to improve them? It plans to back this up by asking local amenity societies for information and comments. "Perhaps London Forum could help coordinate this," Paddy Pugh suggests.

Islington has thirty-four conservation areas, ranging in size from the huge Barnsbury Conservation area to the small Chiswell Street area, a small part of that street around the famous brewery.

## Transport News Round-up

### Highbury Station redevelopment

Network Rail plans to upgrade Highbury station have involved serving notice on the newsagent, florist and snack bar whose pitches have been present on the forecourt for twenty years or more. The issue has attracted London wide publicity because the London Mayor is a regular customer of the newsagent.

The work is required to cater for increased numbers using the station when the East London line extension arrives in "early 2011". More capacious and more frequent trains on the North London line will also attract more passengers. Removal of the temporary Post Office building is not part of this plan, but this could change if the much discussed plans to rehumanise Highbury Corner finally are implemented.

Most disconcerting is Network Rail's refusal to grant the stallholders a right of return. Although we are in no position to judge whether the work could be done with the stallholders in situ, the only obstacle to their eventual return is Network Rail's desire to maximise income.

As the work above ground coincides with work to the railway, some of the customers will not be there anyway, although others will take their place. The North London line from Gospel Oak via Highbury to Stratford will be completely closed for sixteen weeks from Christmas. However, Hackney residents who currently use it to reach the Victoria line will be back to the bus and a walk through Highbury station to reach the Victoria line.

### LBI upbeat on ending Highbury gyratory

A further "stakeholders" meeting on May 12th, chaired by Cllr. Stacy, was encouraging about progress on the ground. LBI believed agreement might be near on one of the ownership issues, and from a starting point of twenty parties interested in the development contract, three consortia had been shortlisted. Remarkably, everyone was most impressed by the same presentation.

### Date set for bendy-end

We reported in the last issue that there would be a delay between the start of the new contract for route 38 (retained by Arriva) and the replacement of bendy-buses by new double deckers. The new buses are scheduled to be delivered in November, and the change over date has been set for December 13th.

There will be 72 double-deckers, compared with 50 bendy-buses and before that a similar number of routemasters, so it should be a frequent service. The extra cost is not as much as critics expected. The new buses will again be able to use Clapton garage, reducing dead mileage and wasted staff time. Road works designed to facilitate articulated buses on route 38 are scheduled for completion in February 2010 in Camden; the date in Essex Road has not been fixed as most of the work has not yet started.

### Roadworks cause major disruption at Dalston

Work on the East London line station at Dalston Junction brought a "two month" closure of Dalston Lane west-bound, delaying buses on their way into Islington. From Good Friday, weekend buses include those replacing trains on the North London Overground line. So successful has it been that it has now been extended until October.

### CrossRail consults on construction routes

CrossRail Ltd. has sent the Society and others details of the arrangements for removal of spoil from the construction site around Farringdon Station. There are no major implications for residents but the area has a particularly high level of pedestrian movement at peak periods.

Work is already in progress to facilitate Thameslink 2000 and the CrossRail contractor will only be responsible for work exclusive to CrossRail 1. The CrossRail station will extend to Barbican in the east. Meanwhile the last Thameslink train to Moorgate ran on March 20th. The Thameslink platforms at Farringdon are being extended southwards (there is no room to the north as the track drops to dive under the Circle line) to accommodate longer trains. The southbound platform extension blocks the route to Moorgate.

### London Plan to be amended

The Mayor is proposing to amend the London Plan to impose section 106 agreements on developers taking advantage of CrossRail. Worryingly though, reference is no longer made to CrossRail 1, implying that CrossRail 2 is yet another casualty of the Mayor's obsession with cutting costs at the expense of the service provided.

**New platforms at Stratford.** North London line trains were diverted into the High Level station on April 15th. Passengers should allow extra time if travelling to or changing trains at Stratford.

## Civic Trust

Members may be aware that the Civic Trust went into administration earlier this year. This Society ceased to be a full member when subscriptions were raised a few years ago and very likely others withdrew at the same time for the same reason. Our Committee felt that the London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies provided a voice for the matters of wider than Islington interest with which we are concerned, and of course it remained a member of the Civic Trust. Griff Rhys Jones recently launched an appeal to Societies and individuals to found a new Trust. He is calling for a fund of £50,000 based on at least £50 from each Society and individual contributions. Here is what he wrote.

The day the Civic Trust went into administration was a sad one for us all but it is now abundantly clear that support for a vibrant civic society movement is greater than ever before.

We now need your help to make it happen. We have been overwhelmed by the goodwill which has poured in since the news about the Civic Trust first broke. Hundreds of societies have been in touch asking for something good to come from it all. Your good wishes and practical ideas have been heart warming and I thank you all. There have been offers of help from all quarters and we have found new friends in local government, professional bodies and other community and charity organisations. All are united around the need for a strong champion for civic societies and a network of support that makes their collective voice stronger still.

We can now make this happen. By combining the generous financial and practical support of organisations coming to the aid of the movement with your own practical help and donations, we can build a new movement to support and champion community action for local places.

The National Trust is providing the resources we need for someone experienced to lead the initiative for a year. The Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Royal Institute of British Architects are supporting us "in kind" and providing office space. The North of England Civic Trust (registered charity, no. 513055) is expecting to provide a temporary "charitable home" for our staff and money. English Heritage has stepped in to

ensure Heritage Open Days are secure for 2009. Among other offers, Blackpool Council is supporting a convention for the movement on 15th & 16th October hosted by Blackpool Civic Trust.

We now need your society and its members to match this generosity. The details are still being sorted out but I am delighted to say that Tony Burton is available to take on the leadership role. Tony has over 20 years of experience in the field. He is currently the National Trust's Director of Strategy and External Affairs and spent 13 years at CPRE, leaving as Deputy Director in 2001. Tony was also a founder trustee of Heritage Link and chaired its environmental equivalent Wildlife and Countryside Link. National and local campaigning and community action are in his lifeblood. We are extremely fortunate that Ian Harvey, whom many of you know from the Civic Trust, is keen to be involved. He is already providing invaluable support and we hope he can play a key role in the future.

We know we can only be successful if the future is rooted in what makes a civic society successful. You know this better than anyone and we want to explore all the options with you. Any future arrangement needs to meet your needs and be your champion. We will be announcing the new initiative on 1st June and calling on all of you to contribute your ideas and thinking over the next few months and help decide what is affordable to you. In the meantime, keep an eye on the website at [www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk](http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk)

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### *Society publications*

*Twentieth Century Buildings in Islington*, by Alec Forshaw, £14.99, ISBN 0-9541490-0-9

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

*An architect in Islington*, by Harley Sherlock, £14.99, ISBN 9-78-0-9541490-2-4

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

### *Books from our President and Vice-Presidents*

*Suicide of the West*, by Richard Koch & Chris Smith, £14.99 and available on Amazon, ISBN 0-8264 9023-9

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

*53 Cross Street - the biography of an historic house* by Mary Cosh & Martin King, published by the Islington Archaeology & History Society

*An architect in Islington*, by Harley Sherlock, £14.99, ISBN 9-78-0-9541490-2-4

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*From the Society*

## WEBSITE

The Islington Society agreed last year, as was reported at the AGM in October, to arrange for the design of a Website as a way of providing information for members and for those interested in joining the Society. Sufficient funds were made available for the Website.

The purpose of this note is to ask for advice and input from any members with Website experience or who could suggest where to turn for such advice and input. The background is:

- the Committee formed a working party of two, Jenni Chan and Kathleen Frenchman, to prepare proposals for a Website,
- a Domain name - [islingtonsociety.org.uk](http://islingtonsociety.org.uk) - has been registered,

- a decision was taken in January 2009 to invite a designer to liaise with the working party to prepare the contents of the Website,

- a Home Page was submitted in draft by the designer but it has not proved feasible for the working party to agree the text and images needed for other pages of the Website.

The Committee would like to have a Website in situ by the time of the Society's 50th anniversary next year. It would be very helpful to have offers from members to help with the design and contents of our proposed Website. Please therefore speak or write to either the Chairman or the Treasurer if you would like to help.

The Peasant, St. John Street, venue of this year's annual dinner.



## CHANGES OF OFFICERS OF THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

**Treasurer** Donald Mitchell recently moved away from Islington and therefore decided with regret that he could no longer continue as Treasurer. The Committee expressed appreciation for Donald's efficiency during his eight years as Treasurer. Stan Westwood has agreed to take over as Treasurer and accordingly to relinquish his previous role as Secretary.

**Secretary** Frances Baskerville has joined the Committee and agreed to take on the work of Secretary. The Chairman extends a warm welcome to our new Secretary.

**Committee Members** In recognition of the need to work closely with the Archaeology & History Society while preserving our distinct roles, we are delighted that Andrew Gardner who chairs the Arch. & Hist. has agreed to join our Committee.

There are expected to be vacancies on the Committee later this year. The AGM in October will provide the opportunity to elect any new Committee members required. If however you are interested in joining the Committee, please speak to the Chairman before then. SW, June 2009

### CURRENT OFFICERS

President : 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,

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Secretary: Frances Baskerville,

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☎ 020 7-793 2264; e✉ fb@cirm.org

Treasurer: Stan Westwood,

262, Upper Street, London, N.1 2UQ

☎ 020 7-226 4166; e✉ preppres@aol.com

Membership Secretary: Jenni Chan,

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### *What 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 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 advisers to 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 and is a member of the Civic Trust

### *Annual Dinner 2009*

This year's Annual Dinner was held on 31st March at the Peasant, St John Street, pictured opposite. The 40 members who came for the Dinner were initially somewhat confused by the darkness of the premises. This however proved to be the result of a power cut, the worst effects of which had been eased by the shining radiance of hosts of glowing candles. It had the unexpected advantage of closing the bar downstairs and giving us exclusive use of the premises.

Our hosts had reserved the upstairs floor for the Dinner where we enjoyed excellent food accompanied by select wines. Our President, Lord Smith of Finsbury, addressed us entertainingly and invited all to raise a glass in a welcome toast. By general consent the Dinner had once again been a very agreeable way to meet with other members and to reinforce the strengths of the Society.

**Future Society events****Annual Dinner 2010**

2010 is our fiftieth anniversary and although this year's dinner will be a hard act to follow, we aim to try. We have decided to fix the date early to give everyone the chance to attend. The agreed date is **Tuesday March 23rd**. Please commend this to your diaries.

**Annual General Meeting 2009**

Before the next newsletter, you will receive the annual report and details of the AGM which we plan to hold in October.

**Annual Bill Manley Memorial pub crawl**

*please note changes from last newsletter*

This will be held this year on **Friday, June 26th**, commencing at 6 p.m. A return to the north of the Borough after several years sees us start at the Swimmer, formerly Grafton Arms, 12 Eburne Street (formerly Grafton Street). At 7.30 p.m. we set off via the former Sussex Arms, Tollington Way, now converted to residential use, to the North Nineteen, formerly the Enterprise, 194 Sussex Way. At 9 p.m. we reach the Landseer, formerly the Stanley Arms, Landseer Road. This is a change to the programme advertised in the last newsletter because sadly the Black Horse, Wedmore Street has closed. The chairman has explored every pub between Landseer Road and Junction Road and regrettably none meet the standards appropriate to an event associated with Bill Manley.

**Annual Church Crawl**

**Tuesday July 15th** from 6.30 p.m. prompt

Meet at Wesley's Chapel front entrance, City Road Bunhill Fields burial ground - short visit

Wesley's Chapel Host : Rev. Jennifer Potter

Walk via Bunhill Fields Meeting House and St Luke, Old Street, to:

St Clement, King Square Host: Rev. David Allen

Our monthly **Meet the Officers** events continue at the Marquess Tavern on the first Tuesday of each month, from 9 p.m.

**Other Events in or around Islington:**

**Archaeology & History Society** (meetings at 8.0 p.m. in Islington Town Hall)

*Wednesday 17th June:* "Death in Islington: the role of the Coroner" Kathy Chater.

*Wednesday 16th September:* "Mr Fitkin's War" - An East End Vicar in the Blitz. Rev Michael Peet.

Includes readings from his correspondence, and extracts from his Parish Magazine.

**Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art**, 39a Canonbury Square.

*to 21st June:* "Architecture and Photography in Italy 1930 - 1960" exhibition.

*1st July - 20th September:* "Workshop Missoni: Daring to be Different", celebration of the life and works of the legendary Milan-based Missoni family.

Exhibitions open Wednesday to Saturday 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. (8 p.m. Thursdays), Sunday 12 noon - 5 p.m.

**Canonbury Society**

Sunday 28th June 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. Summer Garden Party for members and guests. Dress theme "In the Red".

**Friends of the Rose Bowl and Urban Hope**

Wednesday & Thursday 8th & 9th July 6.45 pm.

Performances of Shakespeare's "As You Like It" in the gardens of 5 Alwyne Place. (Details on website: [friendsoftherosebowl.org.uk](http://friendsoftherosebowl.org.uk))

**Almeida Theatre**, Almeida Street, N.1

Monday - Saturday 7.30 p.m., Saturday also 3.0 p.m.

*to 4th July:* "When the Rain Stops Falling" Andrew Bovell. *European premiere.*

*8th July - 1st August* Almeida Theatre Summer Festival 2009

**11th Open Garden Squares Weekend**

*13th/14th June* including King Henry's Walk Garden, Mildmay

**City of London festival**

*Monday June 22nd* "London's Lost Rivers" talk by Iain Sinclair, at Barnard Inn Hall, Holborn, 6.0 p.m. [www.gresham.ac.uk](http://www.gresham.ac.uk) for more details.

**Contents on inside pages**

Lisa Memorial walk	2
Jim Lagden; Ryan Kemp	2
Sobell Centre success	3
Bygone shops (4)	6
VAT campaign continues	7
Heathrow third runway	9
Home sharing	10
London festival; HLF in London	11
Transport News Round up	12
The Civic Trust	13
Society pages and other forthcoming events	14