

# ISLINGTON *news*

*The Journal of the Islington Society*

## Islington on lockdown

There was little hint when the last issue of *Islington News* went to press that within five weeks all the events listed on the back page would have been cancelled, and our liberties curtailed far beyond anything experienced in two World Wars. Meetings came to an abrupt halt on March 13th. Ten days later, churches, pubs, restaurants, theatres and shops selling non-essential items were all closed. In some places parks were closed (notably Victoria Park); in Islington, market stalls were compelled to close. With libraries closed, alternative council buildings dispensed recycling bags, and even the shops that remained were required to limit numbers to ensure what came to be known as "social distancing". Lines were painted on the ground indicating a distance of six and a half feet.

With nowhere to eat out and restrictions on take-away services, there was an upsurge in eating at home and some people rediscovered the art of cooking and baking bread. The latter caused a run on flour. Stockpiling of other items was more difficult to explain. In a few places the price of toilet roll rocketed as exponentially as the stock market declined. Pasta and rice, with a two year shelf life, were hoarded along with tinned food and eggs, which have a best before date only a month hence.

Buses trains and tubes continued to run, but were almost empty apart from tube trains in the peak hours, where "social distancing" was impossible. .

The government surprised many with its willingness to spend public money it could only borrow to protect individuals and businesses whose existence was threatened by a sudden unplanned loss of income. The mechanics of getting the money to those in need was soon an issue.

Outdoor market stalls were closed for several weeks in Islington, though not in neighbouring boroughs, although their access was progressively restricted. Cemeteries were briefly closed for fear of being over-run by people exercising either themselves or their dogs. In line with emergency legislation, quasi judicial committees were conducted virtually with the public able to witness them via "Zoom" which for most people entered the vocabulary for the first time. "Furlough" and "social distancing" displaced "Brexit" in common parlance, although Brexit had not gone away.

Although it was suggested that illness to the Prime Minister proved we were all in it together, not everyone was affected in the same way by the lockdown. Car journeys for those who own them were allowed to take people to a park for a walk, but use of public transport was actively discouraged. Some disabled people felt belittled by the announcements made on buses or tubes. Those with gardens catching the sun could sun bathe, the less well off were told they could not sunbathe in parks even if the social distancing rules were met. This last anomaly was redressed from mid-May. Outdoor markets reopened on June 1st.

Inevitably it was not possible to protect all businesses in the same way, or the incomes of those prevented from working. A scheme fair to the self-employed proved difficult to devise.

Support groups for needy residents sprang up through a facebook group, many schools, and Islington Giving. The council focused entirely on dealing with the needs of residents arising from the pandemic, limiting repairs to the essential and ensuring that refuse collections were maintained despite staff absences from self-isolation and infection. Construction work that was not related to safety issues was suspended.

Once the lockdown began to be lifted, all sorts of anomalies arose. It seemed that restoring the economy was given far higher priority than addressing well-being, apart from the well-being of children. The progressive reopening of schools has aroused much controversy. Children are most unlikely to be seriously ill, but are capable of transmitting the disease to staff or through their friends to parents other than their own. AB

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## Islington Society News

### Annual General Meeting

Advance Notice can be given of the next Annual General Meeting, which is to be held in the Town Hall on November 10th.

### Annual Dinner

The Committee fears it will not be possible to hold this event planned for October 20th, until social distancing is relaxed or ended.

### Other events

Dates for planned events listed in the Spring issue will be announced as soon as it is deemed safe to hold meetings of this kind. The Bill Manley Memorial Pub Crawl will not be held in 2020.

### *Islington Society: 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

### Regent's Wharf update

The delayed planning committee hearing on the Regent's Wharf developer's new proposals for the All Saints Street site is now expected on June 23rd. The meeting will be on Zoom, with the link published on the council's website in advance.

The original proposals were rejected by the council and also rejected by the appeal inspector at hearings in June 2019. The inspector was concerned that the scheme would adversely affect the heritage value of the locally listed buildings on the site and would harm the character of the Regent's Canal West Conservation area. He was also concerned at the loss of light for residents in neighbouring Ice Wharf.

The developer has revised its proposals twice, in response to the inspector's objections and those of The Islington Society, Historic England and the Design Review Panel. But the Society believes strongly that the latest proposals do not go far enough to keep the scheme from contravening the Conservation Area Guidelines. These say that the canal and basin façades have a particular architectural character which can easily be diminished or spoilt by inappropriate new development. The Society believes that the height and bulk of the new buildings in the revised scheme would still overwhelm the remaining locally

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 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 Civic Voice

- we publish a regular newsletter

Our web site is [www.islingtonsociety.org.uk](http://www.islingtonsociety.org.uk)



*Regent's Wharf*

listed façades on the canal and on All Saints Street and it has formally submitted these objections to the council. The Society also agrees with the residents that rubble from the redevelopment of the site should be removed by canal barge, rather than by lorry through the narrow streets behind.

These buildings are important as much for their industrial history as for their architectural merit. They were cattle feed silos and warehouses in the 19th and 20th centuries for the Thorley company. They were redeveloped in the 1980s when new windows were inserted. But they still retain their distinctive character and if this is overwhelmed by new building behind the façades, the Regent's Canal West Conservation area will lose one of its greatest assets.

## Safeguarding the Public Voice in Planning in the Covid Era

A joint statement by Just Space, CPRE London, Friends of the Earth and London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies April, 2020

The new Covid-19 regulations for Local Authority meetings risk undermining the community's role in the planning process, as decisions could be made in virtual committees and closed meetings for up to one year.

The way the planning system operates, like so much else, is going through significant change as a result of the Coronavirus. It is vital that the process is not distorted in ways which disadvantage the vital role of community groups in informing local planning decisions.

While planning has an important role to play in economic recovery, we have found serious dangers in the way in which some councils are changing their decision-making processes, which could result in long-term damage to the interests of local communities and to the environment.

Our rapid review reveals that Councils are interpreting the new rules for virtual meetings in very different ways. Some are re-assembling their planning committees online, while others will make key major planning decisions in closed meetings or increase delegation to unelected planning officers. The ad hoc access to the democratic process creates an unfair 'postcode lottery' for local communities. Under normal circumstances major planning decisions are made by a vote in open meetings of elected councillors, with speaking rights for applicants and objectors. Fairness and transparency are fundamental to every Local Authority's constitution and to planning policy. These principles risk being eroded. We are calling on the Secretary of State and Local Planning Authorities to safeguard the role of local communities in the planning process and ask them to respect six key principles:

1. No planning application normally decided by a committee should be decided using delegated or executive powers.
2. Virtual meetings should be reliably live streamed

on video, with speaking rights for public objectors / third party representatives, as with normal committee meetings.

3. Councils should produce a report setting out how, under the Covid 19 regulations, they will follow best practice for the involvement of communities, particularly disadvantaged communities and those with less access to technology and broadband.

4. Councils should create, and promote widely, a designated website page giving full information on upcoming meetings and consultations, providing clear guidance to communities and third parties on how to take part.

5. Councils should look to extending deadlines attached to the determination of planning applications and responding to consultations.

6. Any public referenda or votes associated with Estate Regeneration should be put on hold until there is a reliable, democratic way to vote, as has happened with the referenda for Neighbourhood Plans.

### The role of Government

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) must do more to recognise the important role of communities in decision-making and to highlight the risks of failing to engage local communities. The input and expertise of communities and third parties can be critical to the creation of better, more resilient developments. We are calling on Ministers to temporarily relax or extend deadlines for the determination of planning applications, to take the pressure off councils while they make the necessary changes to their systems, and to provide further guidance to them. The pressure to keep the economy moving is not a reason to allow short-term, environmentally-damaging development that we may live to regret.

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### *Books from our President and late 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, photographs by Pauline Lord, published by the Islington Archaeology & History Society

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

## Dr Pitcairn's Physic Garden and the Wilson Estate - Part 1

*After the exhausting walk undertaken in Holloway Road, the focus shifts to a smaller compact area of the Borough in this article by Michael Gwinell, the first in a series of three.*

The land-locked enclave off Upper Street now comprising Almeida Street, Battishill Street, Napier Terrace and Waterloo Terrace was once the physic garden of distinguished physician Dr William Pitcairn FRS (1712 - 91).



Lewis's History 1843



OS Map 1871 edition

Almeida Street, originally called Wellington Street, was renamed in 1890, when the newly formed London County Council decided there were too many streets with that name. Almeida, on the border of Spain and Portugal, was the scene in 1811 of one of Wellington's battles during the Peninsular War. Battishill Street, originally called Hardinge Street, was renamed in 1938. Jonathan Battishill (1738 - 1801) was a composer and organist associated with St Paul's and was buried there. He died in Islington, where in his last months he had taken rooms on the advice of his physician. Henry Hardinge was a distinguished soldier who served with Wellington during the Peninsular War, and later as an MP was Secretary for War in Wellington's cabinet. He was created Viscount Hardinge in 1846. Napier Terrace was named after another of Wellington's Peninsular War colleagues, General Sir Charles Napier, created GCB in 1843.

In 1750 Pitcairn was elected as physician to St Bartholomew's Hospital, becoming treasurer in 1784 and from then on lived in the treasurer's house in the hospital. He acquired his "country residence" (DNB epithet) in Upper Street, Islington, in 1772 and created a five acre botanical garden behind it. He was an accomplished botanist who employed collectors in the East and West Indies. After Pitcairn's death in 1791 his house and garden were sold by auction and acquired by John Wilson (1753 - 1826).

Wilson was a prosperous merchant in silk cloth with warehouse and offices in Wood Street, Cheapside. He was a follower of George Whitefield

and for 30 years the manager of Whitefield's Moorfields Tabernacle, and also involved with the latter's Tottenham Court Road Tabernacle. Wilson's nephew the Rev. Daniel Wilson DD (later Bishop of Calcutta) inherited the advowson of St Mary Islington from his uncle William Wilson (another prosperous silk merchant and John's brother-in-law by marriage) who had purchased it in 1811. Daniel Wilson became vicar of Islington in 1824 on the death of Dr George Strahan, whose house was in Upper Street on the northern corner of Almeida Street (see part 3).

Following the purchase of Pitcairn's estate, Wilson moved from Highbury Place to Pitcairn's house, which was located in Upper Street on the southern corner of what is now Almeida Street. Wilson died in 1826 and it was after his widow's death in 1830 that his sons as trustees of the estate demolished the house and built the three houses now numbered 138, 139 and 140 Upper Street. They are described as newly built in Thomas Cromwell's 1835 Walks Through Islington, which states that the garden was then rented by a Mr J Wood who occupied one of them.

According to Dent's 1805/6 Survey of Islington, Wilson also owned 9 houses in Upper Street between Barnsbury Street and Terrett's Place (as well as one in Terrett's Place itself), which included those either side of a secondary access to Dr Pitcairn's garden depicted in Shepherd's watercolour of 1841 (below), that became the access to Waterloo Terrace. Wilson leased "three cottages and two rooms over a gateway" in 1799, reserving a right of way through the yard to his garden.



In 1837 land behind the new houses at 138-140 Upper Street was leased to the Islington Literary & Scientific Society where they built the premises now occupied by the Almeida Theatre. That society had been founded in 1833 and originally occupied rooms in Mr Edgeworth's Academy in the building now numbered 133 Upper Street. Their new building, designed by Gough and Roumieu in the neo-Grecian style, was constructed in record time by William Spencer Dove (founder of Dove Brothers), being formally opened in 1838 at which was read a poem composed in honour of the occasion which included the following lines:

*A few short months and o'er the scene we tread  
Wild weeds grew rank and noisome vapours  
spread*

*(It was a lone and desolate recess  
A garden faded to a wilderness).*

At about the same time as the construction of the Lit & Sci in 1837, Nos. 1-4 Wellington (now Almeida) Street (two linked pairs of semi-detached houses) were built by the Wilson estate as part of an intended new square. They had been built by 1838, being listed as empty in that year's rate books. License to demise for up to 99 years in respect of the land behind the three Upper Street houses and 40 feet to the north had been granted to Stephen and Josiah Wilson as trustees of the Wilson estate in 1836 "in

consideration of building substantial brick dwelling houses of not less than the third rate or class and each house not to be of a less annual value than £40".



These houses, one of which depicted above has been owned and occupied by the author since 1975, are not of standard builders' copy book design. They show the hand of an architect, with Greek key architraves and shutter casings in the principal rooms and lath and plaster internal false walls at the ground floor front to provide correct symmetrical floorplan proportions. Ground and first floor rooms have 10 foot ceilings and the first floor rooms have acanthus leave cornices. There is no evidence to suggest Roumieu was involved, although the fact that they were built concurrently with the Lit & Sci is suggestive. They were listed Grade II in 1972 along with the Lit & Sci building on the initiative of Laurence Isaacson, an architect then resident at No. 4.

*In Part 2 we shall trace the development of the four streets and subsequent events affecting them up to the present day, concluding in Part 3 with the buildings at the Upper Street ends of Almeida Street - Myddelton Hall and Wellington Hall - and Waterloo Terrace. - Premier House (No. 1 Waterloo Terrace) and Bouton Place.*

## A walk from York Way to the Rosemary Branch

*This walk marks the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Regent's Canal in 1820. It is part of a series of Islington walks devised by Andrew Clayton that draws on the research of the volunteers that took part in the Listed Islington project. This reviewed and revised the 1600 or so locally listed buildings in the borough.*

The walk starts in the Regents Canal West conservation area at the steps from the bridge on York Way over the canal. The 390 bus provides convenient access to the tow path on the north side of the canal. The canal was engineered and designed by James Morgan, who was an assistant to the architect John Nash. Neither Morgan nor Nash were experienced canal engineers and there were many financial and technical problems as it was built. But it became one of the most successful parts of the British canal system, linking the Grand Union with the Thames at Limehouse.

On the north side are sections of the original retaining wall constructed when the canal was first built, or shortly after. On the other side of the canal, after King's Place, Battlebridge Basin and Ice Wharf, is Regent's Wharf, the most important group of industrial buildings on the Islington section of the canal. [photo p.2] This pair of cattle feed mills and warehouses was built by the Thorley company in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were altered in the 1980s, with windows inserted, but they provide a rare glimpse of the industrial power of this part of early 20th century Islington.

Climb up onto Caledonian Road at the next bridge and you can see the west facing portal of the tunnel under Islington ahead. It is appropriately sinister with heavy rustication in the John Nash style. Light at the end of the tunnel is just visible.

From Caledonian Road walk up Wynford Road, Rodney Street and Donegal Street to White Lion Street and one of Islington's most interesting pubs, for its history more than for its architecture. This is The Three Johns, at No. 73 White Lion Street. A pub has stood on this corner since the 1780s. The building we see now dates from the very end of the Victorian and the beginning of the Edwardian eras, built for Watney Combe Reid between 1899 and 1901, in what was then Finsbury. There is some difference of opinion about the origin of the name. A more prosaic account is that the three local men who developed the site in 1781 were all called John. More interesting is that it was named after John Wilkes, the radical thinker of the 1700s, together with John Horne, a follower of Wilkes, and John Glynne, his lawyer. Most likely is the three brewers who commissioned it.

The Three Johns has also been identified by recent historians as the location for one of the key

events in pre-revolutionary Russian history. It was here in August 1903 that Lenin, Trotsky and about 50 other committed agitators, all of course in exile, met to plot the downfall of Tsarist Russia, and disagreed so much that they divided into the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. Visiting now, it is hard to see how they all fitted in, let alone split.



The Three Johns

Further towards the Angel, on the corner of Islington High Street, is the old White Lion pub, which gave the street its name. What is now 23-25 Islington High Street was an important cattle drovers' inn on the route to the London meat markets, from at least the 1660s. It was rebuilt in 1714, a date recorded on an original panel on the White Lion Street frontage, with the monogram of Henry Penton, owner of the surrounding land. It was rebuilt again, in 1898, for Eli Perry, victualler, of Oakley Square, Camden Town. This too is recorded on a panel, with the lion motif facing that of 1714. The pub closed in the 1960s and is now a branch of HSBC. It has adapted well to its new role.

Round the corner to the left is No. 29 Islington High Street, a highly ornate Victorian Flemish Baroque building with terra cotta and brick detail crammed into a narrow façade. It was built in 1884 for Alfred Goad, a watchmaker. Goad clearly had money to spend and every floor is a showpiece, including a fine arched balcony on the third floor. Under the crowning scrolled pediment, he displays the monogram AG&S for Alfred Goad & Sons. It is as if Mr. Goad were trying to compete with the building next door, completed a few years before. The shopfront has gone but the rest of the building

compensates for its loss. You have to risk your life in the middle of the High Street for the best view.



Alfred Goad's emporium, 29 Islington High Street, centre left.

Further along 31-37 Islington High Street are at first sight a fine late Victorian Baroque Queen Anne revival symmetrical façade, complete with highly elaborate Dutch gables above the central and outer bays. It was originally built as a speculative venture, a group of shops with dwellings above and behind. It had an arched entrance to a yard within. The shopfronts were of polished granite with plate glass windows. The architect was Arthur Vernon, who practised in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire as well as London in the 1870s and 80s. In 1870 he succeeded his father as land agent to the Earl of Beaconsfield (aka Benjamin Disraeli). But sadly the date inscribed at the top of the façade, just below the central pediment, is 1987. The whole of Nos. 31-37 was rebuilt in 1986/7 as a brick by brick facsimile of the original by Greater London Properties. The bricks have matured well, and it matches its neighbour at No. 29, but it is still a reconstruction. The Council may question its place on the local list.

Across the High Street, and down Duncan Street to re-join the canal at the junction with Colebrooke Row, you can view the magnificent east facing portal as the canal emerges from tunnel. The towpath follows the back gardens of Noel Road with a retaining wall made up of panels of fused brick wasters with piers, plinths and coping of pinkish stock brick. There are eighteen panels curling down from Colebrooke Row to Danbury Street bridge and supporting the "hanging gardens" of Noel Road. The wall seems to date from the laying out and development of Noel Road rather than the construction of the canal. In an 1837 engraving the wall is lower and only supports a very gentle slope. Beyond the Danbury Street bridge, you reach the complex of canal locks and other structures which are at the heart of Islington's section of the Regent's Canal. The centre piece is Lock 5, at the junction with the City Road Basin. The basin superseded

Paddington as the main goods distribution point for London. Lock 5 is a working lock with canal boats moored above and below. It retains most of its fittings, though the second parallel chamber is no longer used. The bollards that stretch above and below the lock are original and also locally listed, as are some of the retaining walls.



Lock 5, Regent's Canal.

Continuing on the towpath towards Hackney, to the bridge leading to Baring Street and Southgate Road, we find a group of pubs which must have refreshed many thirsty barges who had just legged their way through the tunnel.



Rosemary Branch public house

The Rosemary Branch public house is an important old pub, built soon after the cutting of the Regent's Canal and the construction of the New North Road in the 1820s. It once housed a music hall, now a theatre. It shares design details on its elevation with the Baring Arms nearby and makes a handsome pair with the Southgate Arms (also locally listed) next door. They were known as the 1 and 2 from their postal addresses. The Southgate Arms sadly lost the battle for survival with its grander neighbour in the early 2000s and is now a single residence.

## Former Councillor Wally Burgess



Wally Burgess, who was a Councillor in Canonbury Ward between 2010 and 2014 (having previously been a Councillor in St George's Ward from 1998 to 2010), died in April from Covid-19. Wally was a wonderful man, very funny but hard-working and dedicated. His widow Janet said that he loved Canonbury and was very proud to represent its residents. Sadly, his health began to deteriorate towards the end of his term in office and he had to step down, but he will be remembered fondly and with great respect by all those who knew him.

Wally Burgess was born in Barking, east London. His father, Walter, was a postman while his mother Olive raised two children and went to work in a factory to help fund Mr Burgess's education. He went to University College London to study physics and later worked in IT.

He met Janet in 1970 at a local Labour Party ward meeting in Ilford.

She moved to Dartmouth Park because she knew some friends who lived there and Wally soon followed. They married in 1973.

He was co-opted to Camden council as an alderman in 1975. The couple later moved to Archway, Islington, where they brought up their three sons.

Janet was elected to Islington council in

1997 and Wally followed a year later. He had not been eligible to stand at the time of the selection of candidates, but the chosen man was elevated to the House of Lords at the last minute, by which time Wally was able to take his place. Some say this was the best thing the then Prime Minister ever did for Islington.

Janet Burgess the deputy leader of the council said: "He was irrepressible. He had an amazing sense of humour and he would tell long, convoluted stories just to end up with some frightful pun" Labour MP Catherine West, who worked with Mr Burgess during her time as Islington Council leader, added: "He was the life and soul of any party. He was always very outgoing and he made a lot of jokes. We always had a good laugh and he loved all the shenanigans going on at the time, but he was also very serious about his work. He was full of life. So, for Covid to have attacked him and for his family not to be able to be with him is just so hard."

Current Islington Council leader, Richard Watts, said: "He was a people's person and he had waspish ideas that he was always trying to put into action."

Former Councillor Barry Edwards has retained a video of the council meeting in 2010 at which the Liberal Democrats budget was rejected after a stirring speech against by Wally. For those of us whose last memories of him were during his final illness it is a welcome reminder of just how humorous he could be - and there was no daft pun at the end of that speech. A celebration of Wally's life will be held when circumstances allow.

*This is an amended version of the tribute by Calum Fraser in the Camden New Journal.*

## Former Mayor Anna Berent



Long standing Society member Anna Berent has died at the age of 93. Anna was proud to have been the oldest Mayor of contemporary times, in her final year as councillor for Mildmay ward. She represented it from 2002 to 2010.

Anna was born and raised in Islington. She trained as a physiotherapist and worked at St. Thomas'

hospital in this role. She was a founder member of the SDP in 1981 and moved from there to the Liberal Democrats. Her politics were more profound than simply anti-Labour, borne out by the respect in which she was held by her predecessor in Mildmay, Pat Haynes. Anna was active in the No Channel Tunnel Group, which helped secure a realignment of the Channel Tunnel Rail link under the North London line so that it was directly underneath fewer houses. She was a leading light in the Newington Green Action Group. For twenty years, she organised the annual



St. Paul's Shrubbery Festival. Though she laid claim to the title oldest Mayor, she related well to young people. Her Mayoral year was regarded as a success, notwithstanding the changing political balance, and illness towards the end of the year which limited her mobility and was diagnosed some time later as a form of ME.

She recovered from this to scare off a burglar, and to take on the council over its responsibility for Plane trees undermining houses. Her home was particularly well sited for the Liberal Democrats as it faced one of the polling stations.

Terry Stacy, who led the council at the time of Anna's Mayoralty, described her as a true champion and a community legend. "Islington lost

a true Liberal champion & community legend with the passing of former Liberal Democrat Councillor & Islington Mayor Anna Berent. Her role with the community saw Newington Green transformed and Mildmay truly put on the map. Anna was a founding member of the SDP in the borough, a truly remarkable woman, whose dedication to her community was second to none and was a great advocate of community politics. She will be missed by all that knew her."

She followed Pat Haynes to her final residence, a care home in Potters Bar. She is survived by her son Anthony.

## London Plan & TfL: Government declares war

The Government response to the Mayor's London Plan, written in terms no established civil servant would countenance, rejected much of the Mayor's housing targets and left no time for its adoption before the expected GLA elections. In the event, the elections were postponed and the Covid-19 pandemic led many to question the assumptions for future growth which both central and London government had hitherto made.

The Mayor responded in remarkably conciliatory tone, but events have conspired to hinder further progress. The GLA was slow to reform its committees under the terms of the emergency legislation permitting "virtual" meetings. So many experienced Assembly members were expecting to stand down and found themselves compelled to serve a further year if they are constituency members. Those chosen by their party and elected via the top up list can be and have been replaced without further plebiscite.

The stand-off between government and Mayor continued over the TfL budget. Having asked the Mayor to provide as full a service as possible to meet the needs of key workers, and promised to underwrite the cost, the government only did so to a limited extent with strings attached. These included an end to free travel for under 18s (throwing additional unexpected costs on to the 33 Boroughs), and the temporary restriction of over-60 and freedom passes in peak periods. This directive seemed to be co-ordinated with the Conservative candidate for Mayor: similar tactics were successfully deployed in the West Midlands.

Neither the government nor the Mayoral candidate displayed much grasp of the extent of Mayoral powers. Ending free travel in the evening peak, or restricting eligibility to the over 75s, would require amendment to the 2008 Transport Act. Similar ignorance leads to allegations that the Mayor is not building enough houses: granting planning permission does not guarantee it will be used, and relaxing the rules does not prevent developers for demanding more than rules allow.

A further condition of the emergency funding is that there should be a review of TfL's financial position. If this is in any way independent, it could backfire on the government. It should show that the removal of government subsidy was based on the expectation of income from Crossrail; that any failure to keep the Crossrail team up to the mark was a joint responsibility, since Crossrail were answerable to both; that freezing fares mitigated the decline in use of public transport, so its cost has been exaggerated; and that the most significant adverse impact on TfL funds came from scrapping the CGZ western extension, pursuit of the vanity bridge project, and the introduction of an over-60 pass, all decisions of the previous Mayor.

Not all community groups are dismayed that the New London Plan has run into problems, for very different concerns to those of the government. Many were disappointed at the lack of support for social housing and at the removal of "reducing the need to travel" as the first transport policy.

## Good time to bury all news

Some non-Covid activity continues and with the usual means of communication out of commission it is quite possible that changes will catch the people affected unaware.

Some government consultations that had begun before lockdown have been extended. A consultation on replacing the Retail Price Index, due to close on May 22nd, has been extended into August. An interesting paper on Decarbonisation, offering consultation meetings on a plan to be prepared in time for the Cop26 summit in Glasgow faces an uncertain timeline with the Glasgow event postponed sine die and the meetings impossible to hold.

Just when we were celebrating the conversion of the Conservative government to a policy statement that the default modes of transport would be walking, cycling and public transport by 2041, Covid-19 came along and with it the advice to drive rather than use public transport where possible. Fortunately for the quality of air in London, which has massively improved during the pandemic, it has not proved possible for too many people although traffic levels are starting to increase and queues can once again be witnessed on the approaches to Highbury Corner.

Linked to the decarbonisation paper was a more formal DfT consultation on the regulatory regime governing transport. The deadline for comments has been extended. One of the key issues raised was the status of e-scooters. These are currently illegal, although there is little enforcement, and consultees were invited to comment on whether this should be altered. Although the consultation period has been extended, the government has decided to go ahead with trials of legalising e-scooters without delay. Some consensus seems to be emerging that they should be allowed on carriageways but illegal on pavements. Their speeds are incompatible with safe walking.

Although the encouragement for private cars was bad news, there was better news in the form of funds for temporary improvements to conditions for walking and cycling. Although cycling has been well supported across most of London, measures to facilitate walking have been harder to find. Some of the schemes deal with problems that we hope will be temporary, namely queues outside supermarkets observing social distancing. In other places, pavements are too narrow to accommodate passing

buggies and are in more urgent and permanent need of widening. Islington Living Streets is encouraging its members to ask for roads to be limited to buses and cyclists where there is a pressing need for a wider pavement.

There were concerns that some Boroughs would take advantage of the lock down to pilot unpopular planning decisions through a poorly attended committee, or even one given no publicity at all. This concern led to the joint initiative reported on page 3. In most Boroughs, the main concern has been the number of elected members attending meetings on Zoom. While there may be valid reasons for this, a larger group of councillors is more likely to reach a balanced decision, particularly if an application is broadly in line with local and London-wide plans but needs a few conditions to keep it in order.

The various schemes designed to help small businesses, their employees and the self-employed weather the economic storm in order to be able to resume business when conditions allow have inevitably thrown up some anomalies which the government failed to anticipate. MPs surgeries cannot be held face to face but virtual surgeries have enabled them to pursue cases. More problematic has been the task of holding the government to account. Prime Ministers Questions, on the few occasions they have been held, are not the same without the baying mob of MPs. Some would say this is an improvement, but the well timed intervention and in other contexts the supplementary question fill a valuable service. Most serious from the government point of view is the difficulty of enacting secondary legislation. Normally there are about 2,000 statutory instruments laid before Parliament each year.

This week Parliament is returning to something closer to normality, although social distancing will persist and means will have to be found to enable Members who cannot attend the House to continue to fulfill their obligations to Parliament and their constituents.

The Greater London Assembly held its annual meeting. Jennette Arnold who is self-isolating has been succeeded as Chair by Navin Shah. Islington's AGM has been postponed. Troy Gallagher must await his term as Mayor. Most of the public Mayoral functions cannot take place during the lock-down.

## Transport News Round-up

### Crossrail update

Construction work on Crossrail was suspended for several weeks following lock-down, although work on the IT supporting signalling was able to continue. The Mayor has given no revised estimate of the opening date. A likely effect of this further delay is that the central section might open ahead of Bond Street station, which has the most construction work still to be done.

### Bus services in Coronavirus

Bus services were marginally reduced first to a Saturday and then a Sunday service, with additional buses at peak times. The intention was that they should only be used by key workers. When the lock down was eased on May 10th, the Prime Minister urged people to avoid public transport and the policy was that car use was to be preferred. This proved impractical for many, and social distancing in the new peak became impossible.

Sadly 29 bus drivers were victims of Covid 19, and belatedly boarding by the front door was banned. This meant access to the Oyster reader was no longer possible on most buses and they were free: this produced a slight increase in use. TFL was in the middle of converting its New Routemasters to front entry only and this policy had to go into swift reverse.

From the middle of May passengers were asked to wear face coverings to prevent air borne transmission of the virus. Previously the government had resisted this on the grounds that masks increased the risk of transmission by touch. There has been no explanation of whether the estimates of relative risk of air and touch has changed. Supporters of the face covering argue that the touch issue was a smokescreen to cover the fact that there were insufficient masks to go round and priority for them should go to health workers. However, the advice to wash hands is about touch, the ban on hymn books before churches closed was about touch, and the safety measures taken by postal workers are about touch. Common sense would seem to indicate that hygiene is more significant than social distancing.

A more clear cut issue is the advice to carry hand sanitiser, if you can find any, and to use it frequently prior to boarding and after alighting. Many stations have sanitiser dispensers installed.

### Tube services in Coronavirus

Tube services were also reduced, in part out of necessity as staff were obliged to self-isolate or take sick leave. All engineering work ceased. Once lock-

down was eased by the first baby steps, overcrowding on some lines was inevitable. The Deputy Mayor for Transport issued a paper indicating that tube carriages could only carry 21 people if social distancing were to be maintained. She urged spreading the peak, but the chart of passenger numbers before the lock down showed that even between the peaks there were more passengers than social distancing would allow. Moreover, these figures are averages and the actual number is normally distributed about the mean. An average of 21 people would in practice mean half the carriages occupied by more than 21 at any one time. A doubling of numbers cycling and walking would make only a tiny dent in the number seeking to use public transport.

The morning peak has become much earlier - a reflection of the fact that people able to work at home were travelling later than construction workers, and of the effect of the school run.

### Overground timetable changes

Service on the Overground was halved after the lock down and then increased with the introduction of the new Network Rail timetable in mid-May. 75% of the new timetable is to be operated. The decision to step up the number of trains from May 18th was in the public domain before the Prime Minister's May 10th broadcast and had led to some speculation about imminent changes. The call to return to work a week before the timetable improvements also generated some overcrowding.

Engineering work continued throughout the lock down, and in some cases reduced services enabled it to be speeded up.

### TFL finances

Like all local authorities, TFL was instructed to provide services for key workers whatever the cost, but reimbursement from central government was not so straightforward, and came with strings (see report, page 7). TFL estimate that the pandemic will cost them £4 bn. If they are unable to balance their books, all new work would have to cease, including measures to facilitate walking and cycling.

### HS2

HS2 construction continued with scant regard for social distancing and Notice to proceed was issued during the lock down. Work continues around Euston even though Oakervee cast doubt on the plans south of Old Oak Common and DfT's policy remains unclear. AB

## Future Society events

*The Society gives reminders by e-mail of meetings about a week before they are held. Please let the Secretary have your e-mail address if you are not on the existing mailing list.* Fuller details of events are given on page 2. Meetings at the Town Hall except where stated otherwise.

The three talks in the series about Holy Trinity church, Cloudesley Square may be held "virtually" in September. We are discussing this with the tales from the Crypt organisers. We apologize to those members who would have attended a live event but are unable to join a Zoom meeting. At the time the committee reviewed its programme of events it seemed unlikely that traditional meetings could resume for several months.

We are hoping to hold the A.G.M. in November. As a registered charity we are obliged to abide by any guidance from the Charities Commission.

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### *Society publications*

[available from the Society at Resource for London, 356 Holloway Rd., London, N.7 or local bookshops]

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

*The Story of Day Flats in and around Islington*, by Andrew Bosi, photographs from C.F. Day Limited and Oliver Craxton, £5, ISBN 0-9541490-1-7

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

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Following a number of member requests, we intend to move to biodegradable wrappers for future issues of Islington News. Due to Covid-19 the supplier for these is currently unavailable. We hope to make the switch next time.