

# Highbury Fields Association



## Newsletter - May 1997

### Chairman's Report

Visitors to London often comment on how lucky we are to have so many open spaces. Look at a coloured map of the city and the eye is struck by the large splashes of green in areas such as Richmond, Hampstead and Clapham, but the little blob of colour that represents Highbury Fields might not be noticed except by those of us who live nearby.

The large open spaces are known as Metropolitan Open Lands. The sole Islington MOP's, the Fields and the Parkland Walk, account for only 0.1% of the London total and a fifth of the public open space in the borough.

The majority of London's tourists may not know that the Fields exist but for us they are a magnificent heritage from the past that we must guard and cherish. The LBI however sees them as a valuable resource to be used for the benefit of the whole borough.

For many years the HFA has been opposing the staging of very large events there. We believe the impact of noise and numbers, the damage to grass and trees and the loss of the open space is not appropriate for such a small area. We are however trying to work with the Parks department and with the Licensing and Leisure Services committees to achieve a satisfactory policy which would allow reasonable events at decent intervals with a proper understanding of the need for care for the grass and trees and for the concerns of residents.

Our tenth annual tennis tournament will take place on June 22nd. At the risk of tempting the Fates it has always been a lovely, sunny very enjoyable day, masterminded by Jennifer Aykroyd ably supported by her husband James. They spend most of their time now in Yorkshire and so, for the first time, the tournament is under different management, though we still hope to coax them down for the day itself. You will be glad to hear though that Maryse and her helpers are still in command of the lunch arrangements. Do come and have lunch and watch the tennis even if you decide not to play.

We have been very fortunate that Anita de Lotbinière has been able to take over as membership secretary. Although busy in many other activities she has been both active and efficient and has also once again managed to find time to organise and edit this Newsletter.

Is there any hope of a reader of this Newsletter volunteering to be the minute taker at HFA committee meetings?

What else has been on the menu this past year? Firstly the table d'hôte: served up year after year since we started in 1975; a selection from grass, trees, dogs, bollards, lighting, parking, conservation and planning. Sure to be available next year too, but always with fresh ingredients.

On the opposite page, choose from the à la carte menu: dishes which reappear at irregular intervals, some more appetising than others; The Clock Tower, crime figures, the playground, graffiti, soakaways, tennis courts, traffic calming, toilets, rubbish and recycling bins. I am glad to report that the Children's Home, now known as The Crescent Family Centre, is under new management and is no longer a concern.

Lastly the Chef's Special: the Channel Tunnel Rail Link has continued to occupy a great deal of our time and thoughts. The choice of spoil lorry routes, the construction period and the eventual effect of the vent shafts in operation remain a major worry. I hope the result will be nothing worse than indigestion. Our thanks to committee members and also to other HFA members such as David Burgess, Kate Hodgson, Jeremy Gompertz and William Webster for all their time and efforts.

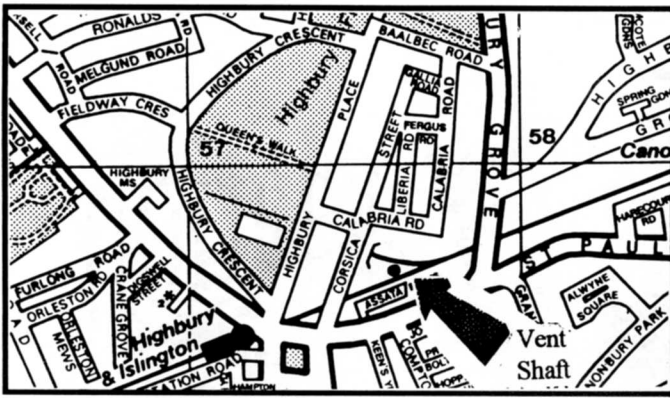
Martin Jones

### Come to the AGM !

This year's Highbury Fields Association AGM will be on Monday June 16th at 7.30pm at Christ Church, Highbury Grove.

Alec Forshaw, Conservation Officer for Islington Council will talk on 'Buildings at Risk' in Islington. This will be followed by refreshments.

Do come and meet other locals and let us know what you think the HFA should be doing on your behalf in future.



### Channel Tunnel Rail Link - the Corsica Street Ventilation Shaft

These are worrying times for those people who live in the parts of Calabria Road, Corsica Street and Highbury Place most likely to be affected by the vent shaft.

The matter is complex. Rail Link Engineering (RLE) a subsidiary of Eurostar submitted their final construction arrangements to Islington Council (LBI) at the end of April after many months of very detailed and intricate negotiations. Members of the HFA and other organisations have taken part in working groups to mitigate the impact of the construction and operation. LBI have endeavoured to safeguard the interests of residents who have had an opportunity to submit reactions to the plan. The final officer's report will go before the Development Control committee on 19 June.

Below is a brief summary of what and where the vent shaft will be and the current situation over the main concerns of residents.

#### 1. The main purposes of the shaft are

- to house fans required for forced ventilation to either extract smoke or to provide fresh air in the event of a fire in the tunnel
- to provide fresh air to a train halted in the tunnel
- to provide access for emergency services
- to provide pressure relief - allow air in the front of trains to escape
- to extract diesel fumes when electricity is turned off to service the tunnel

#### 2. Its location The shaft is to be built in the triangle of land behind the Welfare Centre at 10 Corsica Street currently used by a garden centre and bounded by the North London Line and the single line towards Finsbury Park.

#### 3. The construction schedule

- Shaft excavation. Requiring between eleven and sixteen loads of spoil daily - based on using a maximum of three 18-tonne tipper lorries over a period of 4½ months starting Summer 1998
  - one day only - up to 23 loads of concrete
  - one day only - up to 33 loads of concrete
- Ventilation connection with the down line - two loads of spoil daily over one month.
- Shaft finishing work. Two spoil loads daily over seven months starting January 2000.
- One 20 tonne lorry per week of segmental rings. January to May 2000.
- Construction of the headhouse (over the shaft) takes place from October 1999 - August 2000. It involves 2 loads of concrete daily, 1 weekly delivery of steel reinforcements and occasional exceptional loads of staircases, a crane & equipment.

- Lorry routes have been narrowed down to three alternatives-
  - Two way along Corsica Street. Removing central barrier in St Paul's Road to enter Highbury Corner roundabout. Initial rejection by Director of Traffic for London of plans submitted by LBI on safety grounds. Opposed by RLE. Favoured by HFA.
  - Using the hardstanding on the railway embankment between Corsica Street and the foot of Highbury Place. No official reaction from Railtrack but reluctant. Fears of strength of surface and of embankment. Danger of falling on to overhead electrified wires. Opposition from Circle 33 because of close lorry movements. Problems about emerging opposite Barclays Bank. Would at least require reduction from 18 to 10-tonne lorries. Opposed by RLE.
  - One way circuit via St Paul's Road, Corsica Street, Calabria Road (West), Highbury Place to Highbury Corner. Corsica Street to be one-way northbound between St Paul's Road and the site entrance. Favoured by RLE.

If this third alternative is chosen the following improvements have been negotiated

- The humps in lower Highbury Place to be replaced by noise cushions to control vehicle speed but reduce noise effects. Humps to be replaced after construction period.
- Upper Highbury Place humps to remain.
- Lorries entering and leaving site under control of a banksperson to ensure pedestrian and highway safety.
- Vehicles carrying spoil will be clearly identified and individually numbered.
- Exceptional loads too large to enter Corsica Street (cranes, portacabins, concrete rings etc) via St Paul's Road will come via Highbury Grove, Baalbec Road, Highbury Place and Calabria Road (West). Spoil lorries will not be allowed to use this route.
- They will try to avoid peak holiday periods for safety of children.

Residents in roads where spoil lorries may pass have expressed concern about damage to their houses. Alan Baxter & Associates, respected consulting engineers, have written to the HFA saying that the extra lorries would not constitute 'very heavy' traffic and should therefore not cause even minor cracking of plaster.

#### 5. Working Hours

Normal hours are 0800 to 1800 weekdays and 0800 to 1300 Saturdays with no work on either Sundays or Bank Holidays.

The controversy remains that they have been granted blanket provision to use one hour before and one hour after these times as start up and close down periods and at the moment the allowed activities include loading and unloading of materials and deliveries. LBI are negotiating to prevent the worst of these possibilities particularly in the early morning.

#### Conclusion

A great deal of work has been done before the Act of Parliament was passed to establish standards to control such matters as noise, dust, pollution etc and there will be strict measures to control them. The main concern of many residents will be the disruption caused by the construction period. Those overlooking the site are equally concerned that the statutory controls will be strong enough to enable them to live in peace once the vent shaft is in operation.

Martin Jones

### The Holloway Road Project

This project has been launched by local residents who want to promote and secure improvements to the environment, character and economic health of the whole of Holloway Road.

They held an initial meeting in February 1997. They feel that the interests of the road are often neglected because it forms the boundary of a number of Neighbourhood Areas and they seek to improve the dialogue and initiate changes.

Under the LBI Initiative a number of trees have started to be planted in the central reservation and the Council are keen to encourage the occupation of premises above shops.

Those interested can contact Roger Bone (0171 267 2555) or Sue Glover (0171 607 9023).

Maryse Jones

### The Islington Museum

Perhaps you knew that Charles Dickens drew upon experiences in Islington in writing 'Oliver Twist'? But had you also heard that Thomas Paine is reputed to have composed parts of the 'Rights of Man' near the Angel?

These are among the many items of historical fact and folklore featured in exhibits at the Islington Museum Gallery, located at 268 Upper St., and now into its fifth year of operation. The gallery, run by volunteers and financed largely by private donors with a contribution from Islington Council, has attracted an estimated 10,000 visitors since its opening, including hundreds of school children.

"This is a museum of local history, relevant to the people who live and work in Islington," says Jim Lagden, chairman of Friends of Islington Museum, the main donor group.

The gallery's newest show, 'Beneath Our Feet: The Geology of Islington' is a collection of maps, drawings and fossils that illustrate how the borough evolved from a territory beneath a warm tropical sea more than 50 million years ago into a city with roads, modern communications systems and underground transport. It will run until June 1.

The Islington Museum Gallery, located in premises formerly occupied by the Canonbury Bookshop, is blessed with more than ten-foot high ceilings and a large glass storefront. But rental costs are high and the museum's founders want a larger space for permanent displays of local history and of Islington Council's Sickert paintings. After negotiations with Islington Council, the museum, together with the library service, have been given an option to relocate to a large assembly hall attached to the Town Hall on Upper Street. But the museum must raise money from the Heritage Lottery Fund to renovate the hall which has been vacant since 1989.

"Our bid was submitted before Christmas. We are now waiting for a response," said Lagden. Should the money be forthcoming, the museum will become a multimedia heritage centre for the borough with computer programmes, film, and drama in addition to exhibitions.

Planning the museum's exhibits are the joint curators, Alison Lister and Sharon Bloch who work in Council offices at 159 Upper Street. The gallery is managed by trained volunteers from Friends of Islington Museum. It is open Wednesday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Sunday from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

While Islington Council provides some financial assistance to the museum, most of its operating expenses are covered from private donations. To become a Friend, please write to Jim Lagden, Friends of Islington Museum, 268 Upper St., London N1 2UQ.

Victoria Ellington

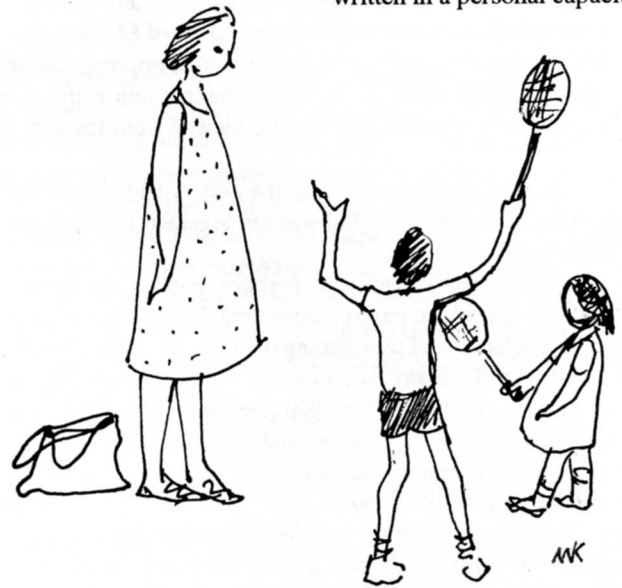
### The Challenge of Achieving a Sustainable Future

We have abused our planet, and have all become depressingly familiar with such problems as global warming, air pollution and the over-fishing of the oceans. Many are becoming more interested in environmentally-friendly products - but many think the environment is self-replacing; the garden is dry and the heavens deliver the rain, a street is pedestrianised and the drivers simply find another route.

If we do want to save our planet, we must all really begin to think long-term and not simply try to find short-term solutions. Governments should encourage and promote change, and must deal for instance with vehicle construction. On a personal level perhaps we ought to pay the actual cost of the water we consume and learn to recycle and not to leave shops with unnecessary packaging.

The planet does need legislation and does need international partnerships but action must take place at every level. If we do not change as individuals, global change is impossible.

Extracted from an article by Ian Crawley written in a personal capacity



### Anyone for tennis?

This year is going to be special. The tenth HFA tennis tournament will take place on **Sunday 22nd June** - apologies to cricket fans who would rather be at Lords watching the Australians - but even without them it promises to be an action-packed day full of excitement.

To celebrate this anniversary there will be many more events this year: take your pick from Men's & Women's Singles and Doubles, Mixed Doubles, Parent and Child Doubles and Singles and Doubles for Juniors too. There are now four new trophies to play for and there will also be a prize for the player or spectator with the most original tennis gear (equipment or clothing).

There will be the usual delicious lunch and this year we have permission for a jazz quartet (not amplified) to play during the lunch interval for our entertainment. We hope you will all come, to watch if not to play, but do remember that the closing date for entries is **Monday, 2nd June**. Phone Charlotte Halvorsen (354 0031) if you need an entry form.

### The Garage Club

Plans are approved and should be carried out soon for a new café frontage to part of The Garage. This will improve the appearance of the Holloway Road front but sadly there are no proposals to upgrade the back of the building.



## The Wallpaper Museum

As you probably know, the Friends of the Wallpaper Museum, with the backing of Islington Council are pursuing an exciting venture to establish the Museum in Islington. The Museum is to be housed at 8 Barnsbury Park, a splendid Regency Villa and the former home of John Perry, the founder of John Perry Wallpapers (now Cole and Son). It is a Grade II listed house and is now on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register. Maryse Jones and I have been pursuing this idea for some years. The plan was to preserve the building and being adjacent to Coles create a Wallpaper Museum. We were exceptionally lucky to enthuse Rick Mather Architects, the highly regarded architects, who are also working for the Wallace Collection and the National Maritime Museum to design the museum.

We then had to get funding. Maryse and I and Lucy Shomali from Islington Council, driven by my husband Tim, very daringly went and did a presentation to the Wallpaper Manufacturers in Preston - a fairly daunting prospect! However we were wonderfully successful and got the promise of £8,000 per year which was very encouraging and acted as a pump primer. This encouraged Coles to come up with their offer of £2,500 a year plus supplying a demonstrator to show how block printing wallpaper is actually created. This he will do in the museum with a viewing gallery above it and it can also be viewed from the café in the museum.

Our next action was to put in a Lottery Bid. Time was very short but a truly brilliant bid was put together, thanks to the very hard work of our team.

We feel very confident, perhaps buoyed up by the very positive support we have received and the kindness of people in showing interest and in returning the Friends' Application forms.

Among the many factors which encourage us to hope for a favourable result are first that the project is small and self contained, with a strong educational emphasis. It fills a gap in the wallpaper museum world. It does not compete with the V & A, the Whitworth or Silver Studio, but will be available to all and tells the history in an exciting way with demonstrations, bringing the wallpaper "off the wall" and into the limelight. Wallpaper has a long and varied history and this will focus on some of the notable people including the ballooning Montgolfier brothers and many, many other fascinating features - Chinese Wallpaper, Pugin in the House of Commons etc. It will also be possible for everyone to try their hand at designing wallpaper themselves and there will be computers with touch screens to change the designs and colourways. It will be a historical overview which will include the people who lived with the papers.

We have letters of support from right across the spectrum - including the University of North London who are keen because the museum will fit in with the syllabus in their Department of Design. Local schools are excited by the teaching potential and the relevance to the National Curriculum. Chris Smith, the MP for Islington South, likes the fact that we are encouraging a local industry as well as the Arts. Letters from local residents show that they are pleased that we are conserving a listed building and bringing it back into community use and also find the project very exciting.

It is planned that the opening date will be June 1999. Due to the time constraints in getting the Heritage Lottery bid in there has not yet been any scope for serious fund-raising; this will be our next task.

Jean Burnett

Many thanks to Gwen Froud who drew the Seven Steps Café on page 5 and to Mary Kleinman for her drawing of the Circus on the back page and for the Highbury Fields sketches.

## The Highbury Fields Conservation Area

This was first designated in 1969 and extended in 1990. The area consists of some of the finest Georgian terraces in the borough, distinguished Victorian villas and the historic 'village' centre of Highbury Barn and Highbury Park. It also includes the streets and properties that front onto Highbury Fields, the largest open space in Islington. This splendid scale of development gives the area a special character and appearance. Many of the buildings are of statutory or local architectural and historic interest and therefore essential to preserve and enhance.



### Is your house a listed building?

Listed buildings are graded to show their relative importance, not in terms of the need to preserve them but as a way of allocating Government grants. 99% of all listed buildings in Islington are Grade II.

The Statutory List comprises buildings of special architectural and historic interest, and is compiled by the Secretary of State for National Heritage, as required by Act of Parliament. The list for Islington was first produced in 1950, revised and updated in 1977, and again in 1994. It now includes over 4000 buildings - there are about 36,000 listed buildings in Greater London.

Generally, the older the building the more likely it is to be listed. Nearly all buildings built before 1700 and most buildings built between 1700 and 1840 are listed. With buildings after 1840 listing will depend on definite architectural quality or technical innovation, strong group value, the significance of the architect, historical associations or other special factors.

If repairs and restoration affect the existing character of a listed building in any way they will require listed building consent. A change of material, from natural slate to artificial slate or concrete tiles for example, or changing windows from timber to UPVC will require consent. Like-for-like repairs do not normally require listed building consent. It is always advisable to check with the Council before specifying or starting such work and owners are recommended to seek professional advice.

The Council and English Heritage will always prefer to see repair and renovation of original materials, rather than their removal, renewal or replacement with new. Regrettably many builders, surveyors, architects and manufacturers often advocate renewal, often for vested reasons. Renewal or replacement often requires less thought, but is more expensive. New materials are also not necessarily better or as long lasting. There are also strong ecological and energy saving reasons which support the conservation and retention of original materials.

Both the Council's Conservation Officer (0171 477 2774) and the staff of English Heritage (London Region 0171 973 3710) are happy to offer advice on any matters concerning listed buildings. If in doubt do not hesitate to contact them. They may be able to save you time and money and to help retain and restore historic fabric.

Maryse Jones

Taken from Islington Council Planning (Listed Buildings & conservation areas) Act 1990 - Buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

### Introducing our new Home Beat Officer

PC Danny Docherty is the new Home Beat Officer for the Highbury Fields area. He has taken over from WPC Rachel Callaghan, who although still based at Highbury Vale Police Station, is now undertaking a new appointment as an enquiry officer. Although he is new to this role, he has worked in the Highbury area for over nine years in a variety of roles. He can be contacted on the same number - 0171 421 0645. He no longer holds a weekly surgery at Drayton Park Neighbourhood Office, which is now closed to the public, but if you ring him he will be pleased to make an appointment at your convenience.

### Islington International Festival News

Some of you will already know that we were planning to present two large scale events on Highbury Fields as part of this year's Islington International Festival: **CineSite**, an outdoor cinema over three nights, screening classic films on a giant inflatable screen, completely free for a family audience; and a spectacular performance by the French company Transe Express. Their show entitled **Les Maudits Sonnant** involves a giant chandelier, thirty feet across, suspended from a crane from which aerialists and percussionists perform in exquisite costumes, a mesmerising display to the accompaniment of acoustic instruments.

Unfortunately and with great regret, we have had to cancel both these scheduled events in order to preserve the Community and Education events and the closure of Upper Street. The total cost of £32,000 of putting Transe Express onto the Fields is made up of £9,000 for artists' fees and the rest goes on technical, Health and Safety, access and security. Due to our Director of Development falling ill last autumn, (a crucial time for proposals to be considered by the large national companies), late submissions resulted in many rejections for the large-scale events. However we plan to present both events next year and we have already begun fund-raising to achieve this. We would like to thank everyone for the support we received surrounding these two events and we look forward to announcing their inclusion in next year's festival.

Despite the blip to our plans, this year's festival promises to be spectacular with two weeks of visual arts exhibitions and activities across the borough.

Just to mention a few of the attractions - **A1 Art** with Upper Street transformed for the fortnight into a massive public gallery with over 100 shops and businesses displaying the work of leading and amateur Islington-based photographers, including David Bailey; **Luminarium IV** at the Business Design Centre, a world of celestial domes, curving passages and luminous columns, just like being inside a kaleidoscope, and on the final Saturday Upper Street will be closed to traffic but open as Europe's longest stage, with roving street performers, spectacular contemporary art and the very best in live music. This will include **'Carnation'** an exhibition of static sculptures based around the theme of 'the car', a **Routemaster 38 Poetry Bus** and the UK premiere of **'Eine Brise'** (A Breeze) by Mauricio Kabel, in collaboration with the Almeida Theatre. This work features a 90 second musical score for acoustic horn, bicycle bell and voice, performed by 111 cyclists at the junction of Almeida Street, Cross Street and Upper Street from 2pm.

There will be activities and entertainments for everyone, from the under fives to pensioners. Leaflets are available in libraries and in all the A1 Art outlets in Upper Street or you can phone 0171 833 3131 for the Information Hotline.

Catherine Reiser  
Executive Director, Islington International Festival



### The Seven Steps Café - 3 Highbury Place

Number 3 Highbury Place is currently empty and awaiting conversion to a single dwelling, after 75 years as an Italian restaurant and more recently, the well-known Seven Steps Café.

The property has been sold by the two remaining Highbury Place-based Tortorella sisters, daughters of Signor Tortorella who came to London from Salerno in 1922. When he bought No. 3 it was in its original condition as a town house, and the downstairs drawing room was converted as a restaurant dining room. The sisters describe this as having been rather formal, with waiters in long white aprons.

Rose, Beatrice, Lucia and their sister Dolly were all born and brought up at No. 3. Dolly eventually married and moved away from the house, and Lucia trained as a dancer and worked for a number of years in the West End.

It is claimed that when Sickert opened his studio at No. 1 in 1927 he was a patron of Tortorella's, and Signor T.'s early model chrome coffee machine was probably installed around this time.

Eventually Rose, Beattie and Lucy took over the running of the restaurant, but decided that they needed to simplify the proceedings and changed the business to a café, specialising in all day breakfasts. This clearly fulfilled a need in the area, and the café became very popular, particularly with Council staff from the nearby offices and people on their way to work using Highbury Station. Lucy concentrated on running the household, and enjoyed choosing decorations and soft furnishings for the 10 bedroom house. Beattie and Rose were in charge of the café, and Beattie also took care of the garden. All three sisters adored cats; they had cats of their own, but also offered unending hospitality and treats to the various cats at No. 2.

Lucia died in 1996 after a short but cruel illness which she bore with grace and courage. At the same time, the sisters had made the decision to retire from the business and to hand the running of the café to their niece and nephew, and after Lucy's death they decided to make a new stage of their lives by moving to a smaller property.

They have now made a radical change, and are settling into a modern house in Winchmore Hill, where they say they appreciate the convenience but miss Highbury. The Council are currently considering the planning application from the new owner for a complete domestic refurbishment, and many people's breakfast habits will have changed permanently with the end of an era of Highbury catering.

Liz Lydiate

## **The Crescent Family Centre 11 - 12 Highbury Crescent**

The Crescent Family Centre is a London Borough of Islington Children & Families establishment providing a range of services to families in need. During the last year the Family Centre has changed its focus and has brought together four essential services to provide an integrated approach to "family support" for Islington's children and families in need. The four services at the Family Centre are The Accommodation Centre, The Family Care Scheme, Home Start Scheme and the Family Support Team.

The Accommodation Unit provides short term residential placements to children up to the age of 14, and will shortly be providing two emergency beds. It is aimed at the younger age group and sibling groups where residential care is appropriate.

The Family Care Scheme provides practical short term support to families in their own home, parenting skills, household skills, respite to children with special needs and time-limited support to foster carers.

The Home Start Scheme is a national voluntary organisation working in partnership with Islington Neighbourhood Services Department to provide a volunteer scheme which recruits volunteers to work with families with children under five.

The Family Support Team works with children up to the age of 14 and their families, providing assessments and planned intervention including longer-term time-limited packages of support to complex families. The team also offers supervised contacts.

The Family Centre has developed a good liaison with the voluntary sector and local community groups and has ongoing a Steering Group set up to bring together representations from the statutory services, local residents, community groups and services in the voluntary sector. The role of the steering group is to oversee the Centre and to ensure effective service delivery to children and families in need.

The centre is managed overall by a centre manager and each individual service within the centre is headed by a team manager. Enquiries can be made to 0171 477 4150.

Jenny Lapompe  
Centre Manager



## **Tramshed Café Bar**

On the corner of St Pauls Road and Corsica Street, behind the advertising hoarding was a building which was used for a few years as a temporary tramshed when the electric tram lines were extended from the Angel to Highbury Corner in 1906 and several extra trams were needed. It had originally been a depot for horse drawn trams. Times change and the trams are now consigned to museums. After protracted and complex discussions about the layout of the forecourt area to ensure a satisfactory appearance and safe unloading for delivery vehicles it is now being developed as a café bar which is scheduled to open shortly.



## **Highbury Pool**

The new gym opened on 1st July 1996 and has been overwhelmingly successful. Our customers enjoy the beautiful space and hi-tech equipment, and the pool's income has increased dramatically, so that on some evenings there is a queue for entry and we now wish that more finance and space had been available.

After the gym was completed, the builders moved on, to convert the old gym space into a health suite featuring a sauna and steam room with a small relaxation lounge. The teething problems are all nearly resolved and the customers are flocking in. We have a well balanced timetable of mixed and single sex use and on Sundays, children, aged 8 and over, may use the area if accompanied by an adult.

Over the Christmas break, when the pool was closed for essential maintenance, we refurbished reception by remodelling the area so that it is open plan and bigger. This allows two receptionists to work at the same time during peak hours, resulting in better queue management and a friendlier ambience.

Later in the year we hope to find the funds to carry out improvements to the men's changing rooms so that they are easier to clean and the opportunity for theft reduced. Unfortunately theft from lockers is a blight on all the facilities in the borough (although only in the men's!). When the work has been done, however, and with extra staff vigilance and the wonderful support we are receiving from the Police we hope to eradicate this problem and, as I write this, we have not had an incident for several months (touch wood).

Besides all these changes we have continued to run our extensive pool programme, which includes adults only, women only, lessons, funsplash, water aerobics and school sessions.

We are probably the busiest centre of its kind in London, primarily due to our location, and at times we are literally run off our feet. Luckily I have a supportive and hard-working group of staff who do their best, under sometimes frantic conditions to deliver a safe, friendly and clean service to the people of Islington.

In addition to the structural changes, the staff have also had to deal with a major change to their employment status. We are no longer directly employed by the Council, but rather by a Charitable Trust. Our trading name is Aquaterra and if you are a user you will have noticed our new uniform and the changes to publicity. The change went smoothly, our conditions of service remain intact and it has saved the Council £500,000 (as charities do not have to pay rates). The Council is still our chief funder and partner but the Trust does hope to build other partnerships within the local community and generally explore new ways of providing for people's leisure needs. The enormously popular and successful 'IZZ' membership scheme will remain in the same form.

So, please come and visit us. With summer approaching, come and enjoy our lovely sunbathing patio as an easy way to start your leisure programme.

Andrea Keeble  
Enquiries 0171 704 2312  
24 hour timetable 0171 226 4186



## Music at the Union Chapel

Set back from Upper Street near Highbury Corner is the Union Chapel. From a distance its clock is an obvious landmark especially in winter when the trees are bare, but from close to it, Compton Terrace Gardens shields it from view. The interior is remarkable. The design is based on the Church of Santa Fossa in Torcello near Venice. It is in the form of a Greek cross enclosing an octagon (the stalls) with galleries on seven sides, offering an unrestricted view of the pulpit from every seat.

For the last two years in December it has hosted The Visual and Dramatic Festival of Music, lit dramatically to highlight the richness of the architecture and the decorative detail (at some moments the great rose window lit glowingly from behind) - lighting devised by the, sadly, late Trevor Kates, whose contribution to the whole festival will be greatly missed. And then the candles! A thousand candles flickering from every vantage point - a delightful and magical sight.

Highlights from last year's festival included 'In Dulci Jubilo', a concert of early Baroque German Christmas and dance music presented by The Hoboys and Shagbuts of London and I Fagiolini. Rich and curious sounds, played on all manner of early wind and brass instruments and sung with command and such delight from many corners of the building. (One was concerned for the safety, and breath, of the participants as they scampered up and down the hidden staircases from one vantage point to the next. But what fun for us, the audience; and what an appropriate and telling use of the building.)

On the Saturday was the premiere of a new work, commissioned for the festival, and with the spatial resources of the building in mind: 'To Mary a Son', a retelling of the Christmas Story by Roderick Williams - who himself played the bewildered Joseph. For me, the great pleasure here was the sense of a community engaged in a significant celebration. The fact that the start was delayed by a blown fuse in the organ didn't matter: we were delightfully entertained by the buoyant artistic director, Robert Hollingworth, and we were a community waiting for the promised and foretold event. And what an event: the massed forces of the Islington Choral Society behind us, the angels and angelic choirs aloft, the young children processing through the chapel towards Mary and the babe, under the kindly and warmly encouraging eye of Joseph/composer, and the power of the organ when it joined the massed voices in the final moments of jubilation. Enormously moving. And exactly what such an event, at such a time and in such a place, should be.

Our thanks go to Simon Caradoc Evans and Robert Hollingworth, and all the organisers and participants who made the 1996 festival happen. Let us hope that it will be possible to find adequate sponsorship for this year as without it, it may not survive and we shall be the losers.

Paul Williams

The Union Chapel and Studio Theatre run events throughout the year. Telephone the Box Office on 226 1686 to discover what is happening, or pick up a Listings Leaflet from Compton Avenue.

## Going, Going, Gone!

The Citizen's Advice Bureau on Highbury Corner closed more than a year ago. Since then it has been frequently broken into, squatted in and vandalised. Pressure has been put on Railtrack, the owners of the land, to demolish it as it is in a dangerous condition and is a health hazard. They have agreed to do this but keep delaying the start date. However, the current timetable is for hoardings to go up by the end of May and the building to be demolished by July.



Christ Church, from Church Path looking North, as it was when it was built in 1848, before the nave extension in 1872.

## The Christ Church Art Group

In about 1986 my late husband and I decided to attend Christ Church, because Charles had Parkinson's Disease, and the walk to St Mary's was becoming too difficult for him. At Christ Church we met a lot of interesting people, including Vera Perry, who asked Charles to help her husband, Bob, with watercolour painting.

Other people then expressed interest and this was the beginning of a small group based around the church. We were then offered the use of the Fellowship Room in the church - a great asset! The group at this stage comprised six members of the church and we started meeting regularly with Charles as tutor. The group gradually grew and changed - some people leaving as work or retirement took them to other parts of the country, and new members joined. One of our members even found us by accident, calling in to ask for directions to the Aberdeen Studios. She liked the look of the group and became a member even though this involves travelling from her home in Holland Park.

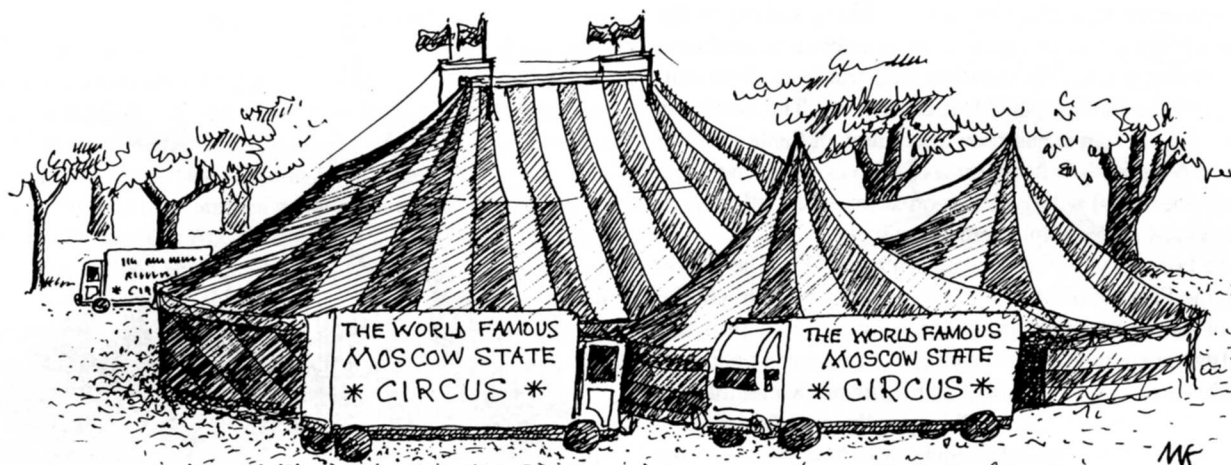
About five years ago, Charles's illness made him unable to continue leading the group and we were very fortunate that one of our members, Ann Stillman, suggested that her husband might be able to help. John Stillman is an architect, now retired, and he agreed to take on the group and has been with us ever since. He provides subjects, tuition and feedback - all for no fee! We are truly fortunate.

The group exhibited at Christ Church during the Highbury Festival, and visitors could - and did - buy work. Tom Quantrill from St Mary's provides a lot of help with framing.

We now have ten members and meet on every Tuesday from 10.30 to 12.30, apart from school holidays. We welcome new members, but don't want to overpower John Stillman; he is invaluable to us. We are also grateful to Christ Church for continuing to provide our meeting place; the group makes a small donation each term towards the cost of heating.

Margaret Mellor

Anyone who would like to know more about the Christ Church Art Group should ring Mrs Mellor on 354 3610.



### Who's been living in my house?

Many famous people have lived, and still do live, in Highbury. Walter Sickert (1860-1942) had a studio in Highbury Place, John Nichols (1744-1826) proprietor and owner of the Gentlemen's Magazine, Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914) father of Neville, Charles Wesley (1703-1791) the evangelist, Abraham Newland (1730-1807) Chief Cashier of the Bank of England, Sir Francis Ronalds (1788-1873), early proponent of the electric telegraph, Henry Charles Dove (1840-1895), whose family building business still operates off Cloudesley Place, Charles Cruft (1852-1938), founder of the dog show and the poet laureate Sir John Betjeman (1906-1984) all lived here.

If you have ever wondered who else lived in your house before you, it is possible to discover quite a lot locally from the Reference Library in Fieldway Crescent where you can find Kelly's Street Directories, rate books, and electoral rolls. Further afield the County Record Office at the Guildhall, The London Metropolitan Archives and The Family Record Centre can provide other information. It is advisable to make an appointment before going.

As an alternative you can commission someone to do this work for you. Sara van Loock and Peter Bushell are independent researchers who will investigate the history of your house back to when the records started. About a third of their clients are businesses and the rest are private homeowners. "Most of my commissions are from clients who have lived in their house for many years and love it, or they are newly arrived in an area and would like to learn a little local history," says Sara van Loock, "I think it gives people a sense of belonging, to see how they are the latest in a long line of occupants and to realise that they too are part of history."

She usually starts from the present owners and works backwards. "There are always pitfalls such as street name and number changes, and delightful subtleties with property names such as Old House, Old House Farm and Old Farm House, which may or may not be three different properties." Some fascinating stories have been uncovered in her research. One client was disappointed to learn that his house had been occupied by one of James II's mistresses, rather than by one of Charles II's, but another, a shoe manufacturer, was delighted to discover that the first occupant of his house had been a shoemaker.

If you would like further details on commissioning your house history contact either Sara van Loock or Peter Bushell at 4 Queen Square, Brighton BN1 3DF (01273 731319).

Joyce Blake

daughter-in-law of Mary Kleinman, member of the HFA.

Adapted from an article in The Times of March 1st 1997

### Committee Members

who currently represent the membership

Martin Jones, *Chairman*

Anita de Lotbinière,  
*Membership Sec*

Maryse Jones, *Treasurer*

David Boniface

Jeannie Burnett

Victoria Ellington

Jean Engel

Muriel Feder

Judy Graham-Blair

Bay Hodgson

Carrick James

Ian Kelly

Randal Keynes

Mary Kleinman

Liz Lydiate

Robin Mabey

Jennifer Purchase

Miles Thompson

Paul Williams

Ginnie Worsley

Nominations for new members for the Committee, proposed and seconded by members of the HFA, should be made to Anita de Lotbinière (see above) by Thursday 12th June. Appointments to the Committee will take place at the AGM on 16th June.

### Editorial thanks

to all the contributors and illustrators who created this Newsletter, to the proofreaders who found the errors, to the London Transport Museum and to the Local History Library at Islington Central Library for allowing us to use their picture of Christ Church.

ACdeL