

Highbury Fields Association



Founded in 1971.

Affiliated to Living Streets - Islington
and the London Forum

Newsletter - October 2007

Chairman's Report

Photographs of Highbury, taken a century ago, can often be hard to identify, even for areas we know well. Old buildings have often been replaced; Highbury Fields itself has greatly changed.

And the process of change continues – probably faster now than in all of those hundred years. There is pressure for change: the Mayor's London Plan commits Islington to a rapid rise in population. The borough has had to respond to that pressure for new accommodation (50% of which have now to be affordable homes) by relaxing previous limits on height and building density.

The HFA has had plenty of other topics to involve us this year – including the impact of the new stadium; the 'Vision' exercise for the Fields and the proposed 20 mph zone, which readers will find later in this newsletter – but it is the continuing growth of new developments that concern us.

None of us can afford to sit back and assume that the *status quo* will prevail. Developers know that the planning regime in London and the south-east favour larger, taller and denser developments. What is

alarming is that Islington is already the second most densely populated borough in Britain. Buses and trains are already overcrowded, as are doctor's and dentist's surgeries and our schools.

Do not assume either that large developments can only take advantage of empty plots. Tear down a 3-storey building; replace it with six storeys – or more. Just in our area alone we have all the Arsenal buildings on three main areas – and now with 21-storey towers in Queensland Road soon up for planning permission.

Then there is the huge Aberdeen Works complex in Highbury Grove, which we fought for nearly three years and lost recently on Appeal. At least two sites in Corsica Street and 'Robins Garden' finally built on the Fields. The new Tesco store + flats are sprouting rapidly next to the Magistrates Courts on Holloway Road. Nearby on that road the plans for replacing the taxi-cab Mann & Overton buildings with 6 and 7-storey flats have just been refused permission after a fierce fight by residents, but we may well lose when it goes to Appeal. If it does go ahead the view of St Mary Magdalene from Highbury Fields would be lost for ever.

AGM

On Monday 29th October 2007

At Christ Church, Highbury Grove, London N5

7.30 for 7.45pm

Guest Speaker: **Harley Sherlock**, RIBA AA Dipl FRSA Past President of the Islington Society, will speak on "Cities are Good for Us"

Fortunately residents are becoming much more aware of plans for new buildings, although consultation from LBI is normally only to immediate neighbours of the site, so it is easy not to know of one in your part of Highbury. So tell your friends and neighbours and work with them to object to unreasonable plans, by letter but also by coming as a group and speaking at planning meetings – both can be very effective. The HFA keeps a watching brief (concentrating also on questions of conservation and design) but local knowledge in a particular street is most important.

You can now perhaps see why we are concerned; it is why all of us should be concerned.

Martin Jones

Changing Noise Levels

Everybody is worried about noise, be it from neighbours, construction or traffic. Islington Council offers excellent advice and protection on their website. 'Bothered by noise?' states that 'People can be bothered by many types of noise. The main noises that cause problems are loud music, burglar alarms, car alarms, fans and motors, barking dogs, DIY and noise from construction sites.' We have all experienced these and I, for one, have probably caused some irritation through DIY. But these are not my reason for writing.

When we first came to live on Highbury Fields we were shocked by the high noise levels in comparison to the sleepy backwater in Barnsbury where we had been living. The heavy goods trains on the North London Line used to rock the whole terrace in the early hours but they don't any more: the Victoria Line could just be heard vibrating away deep below us and it still is. But the real horror was the relentless roar of the trucks braking at the Highbury Station lights (and at that time the pedestrian crossing) and then accelerating away again up what is still The Great North Road. Then one day in 1986 it stopped: the M25 had opened and relative peace descended.

Over the years the sounds of birds and animals have ebbed and flowed but there is a new monster. I am woken at six most mornings as the first in the procession of planes flies over and drowns out the background traffic noise that had been growing for an hour from a quiet only broken by the emergency

services. Over-flying may have been going on for a long time but over the past year I have become very much more aware of it. So why do we have to put up with this invasion of our privacy, when we live about 25 miles from Heathrow and Stansted?

A good few years back the HFA organised a speaker from HACAN (Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise) to speak at our AGM. I listened attentively if somewhat puzzled by what it had to do with us, 25 miles away from the action. Little did I realise then the importance of thinking of us as Londoners, not just a group lucky enough to live on or near the Fields. HACAN have an excellent news service on their website (www.hacan.org.uk)

The Mayor of London is concerned about a whole range of sources of noise pollution and has also developed a comprehensive Ambient Noise Strategy [2004]; and impressive it is, especially in the way it links into so many other policies. On aircraft it says that the Mayor

1. Supports the view that night flights should be banned.
2. Believes that aviation should pay its fair share of environmental costs, like other industries.
3. Wants to see more financial incentives used to get noisier aircraft replaced by quieter ones.

BAA comes over all sympathetic on their website and have launched in July a new website on www.baa.com/noise as a one-stop shop on noise, allowing us to look at actual flight tracks and see how high the planes are flying in relation to where we live and work.

In the 2002 GLA Household Survey, 13% believed that road traffic was the biggest noise problem and 6% cited aircraft noise (4% noisy neighbours). Obviously those under flight paths or stacks are most affected and it is said that Mayor Livingstone wishes to ban stacking over London; so what do we do now? While some are concerned about the environmental cost of flying, especially the cost of flying fresh food around the globe, our Government is head over heels in love with air travel and building more runways and even more airports. I would like to think the HFA and the Council could support the Mayor and through our MPs exert what pressure we can to ban stacking and curtail air-flight, in general and over London, in particular.

Robin Nicholson

20mph zone: For & Against

IN FAVOUR of the 20mph zone

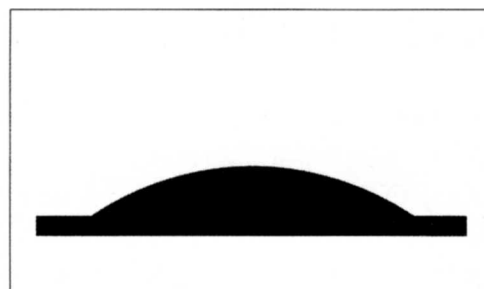
Local residents, under the banner “20’s Plenty for Highbury Fields” have campaigned for a scheme that will encourage responsible driving through the area to enhance the safety and tranquillity of the environment. The multitude of ‘20’s Plenty!’ posters in people’s windows is testimony to the strength of local support.

At the East Area Committee on Monday 10th September, HFA Committee Members, Martin Jones, Caroline Russell and Octavia Jennings made deputations supporting the 67% residents’ vote in favour of traffic calming, pointing out that in an area as heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists as Highbury Fields it is extraordinary that we have tolerated traffic speeds that present such a serious risk.

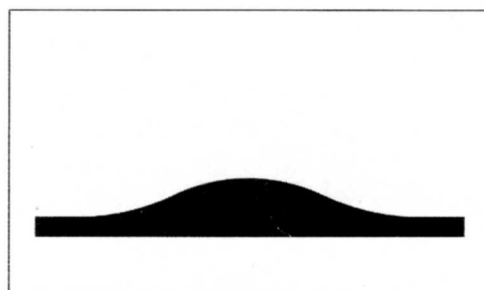
Some residents, including Paul Williams, HFA Committee Member, expressed concern regarding the introduction of speed humps and associated signage. In response Zahur Khan, LBI traffic and Safety Manager, emphasised that Sinusoidal Speed humps are designed to be driven over smoothly at 20 mph and are spaced to deter the problems associated with stop/start driving caused by conventional humps, widely spaced. He reassured the audience that new signs would be restricted to the boundary of the zone and existing signage would be removed. Councillors voted unanimously to approve the proposed 20 mph zone for the Highbury Fields area.

Islington Council should be congratulated for responding so effectively to the problem of speeding traffic around the Fields. Following numerous complaints from residents and community groups, Council officers have gathered data on traffic speed and volume, confirming there is a problem and, after two preliminary meetings with HFA Committee Members, created an imaginative yet practical traffic calming solution, secured funding from Transport for London and consulted residents.

Designed to encourage safe driving, the scheme will allow pedestrians and cyclists to use and enjoy the Fields in safety. Slower traffic and safe crossings will benefit not only people living in the roads around the Fields but



Round hump



Sinusoidal hump

also the many residents from across the borough that walk or cycle through the area on a daily basis.

This is an excellent example of Islington Council engaging with local residents through meaningful consultation to resolve an issue of enormous local concern. On behalf of the “20’s Plenty!” campaign, we’d like to thank the local Councillors, Council officers and the numerous residents who worked so hard to make it happen. In particular we would like to thank Zahur Khan and Cllr. Terry Stacy. Further thanks are due to Transport 2000 who supplied the 20’s Plenty posters.

Caroline Russell and Octavia Jennings

The results of the 20mph consultation by street were as follows: Arvon 2 in favour/1 not in favour; Baalbec 25/1; Battledean 18/13; Calabria 71/25; Corsica 16/7; Fergus 3/0; Fieldway 21/11; Framfield 17/7; Gallia 4/1; Highbury Cr. 27/19; Highbury Place 25/6; Highbury Terr. 18/10; Highbury Terr. Mews 7/2; Horsell 7/8; Liberia 19/5; Melgund 17/14; Ronalds 15/18.

[Residents have suggested the traffic across the Fields could be reduced by banning right turns from Ronalds Road on to Holloway Road. Transport for London has vetoed this, wanting to free the main roads. An alternative solution, that of making the exit from Ronalds Road one lane only, would have to wait for inclusion in any new scheme being considered for Highbury Corner – Ed.]

AGAINST the 20mph zone

I am not totally convinced that we suffer from a *serious* problem of dangerous driving in our neighbourhood. Moreover, the measures proposed will cause considerable disruption and noise when being constructed, are expensive *and* will make the area visually less attractive – as has happened in Barnsbury.

Nobody can deny that some motorists drive too fast, all over Islington (and the world). But only *some*. We are in danger of over-reacting; of sentimentalising the “poor old” pedestrian and cyclist, and vilifying the motorist. Whereas, after all, a common sight in Highbury is that of *cyclists* cycling on the pavement, or against the traffic and ignoring traffic lights; and pedestrians often step out into the road thoughtlessly, without considering what effect their action might have on the perfectly legitimate flow of motorised traffic. I have been told by a police officer that most accidents that involve motorists and pedestrians are *caused by pedestrians*. The consultation leaflet says “speed humps save lives”; I should like to know how many serious accidents involving cars and pedestrians have occurred in Highbury in the last year, and *who was found to be responsible*.

We all have to take care, but I do not believe that we need the proposed sinusoidal humps and raised crossings. *Humps look ugly*, and the sinusoidal humps in Warltersville Road, N19, are only minimally less uncomfortable to drive over than conventional round humps; and *raised crossings* mean that the clear distinction between road and pavement, internationally indicated by kerbs and gutters, is obscured and therefore create a greater sense of insecurity (as the recent changes outside Barclays Bank at Highbury Corner have illustrated) Moreover, the many pedestrian crossing points in our area, indicated by lower tactile paving, are perfectly adequate and much more frequent than the proposed raised crossings.

If we are to “protect” pedestrians and cyclists from motor cars, are we also going to protect pedestrians from cyclists by erecting low barriers across pavements; are we going to protect motorists from pedestrians by erecting railings between pavement and road?

No, the proposals are expensive, unattractive and a very simplistic attempt to solve a problem. The

problem is not motorists, but thoughtless and anti-social behaviour by us all. How do we change attitudes and behaviour? Not, I suggest, by making our area less attractive and less comfortable to traverse, as these proposals are likely to do.

Paul Williams

The London Forum - Concerns

The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies has the aim of protecting and improving the quality of life of people living and working in Greater London. The HFA are members.

Its executive officers cover a wide range of subjects particularly over planning, design, conservation and the individual character of localities. It has expressed concern this year on the Barker reports for the Treasury advocating reduced community involvement in the planning system.

They also question the Mayor's proposal to narrow the protected viewing corridors of St Paul's Cathedral, allowing more tall buildings and have worked with MPs to limit the Mayor's planning decision powers. They also object to the emphasis on maximising the use of land, when there are policies to determine appropriate densities for sites. The HFA strongly support this stance and agree there should be higher percentages of family sized housing.

Maryse Jones

The 'Vision' for Highbury Fields

We have had the lengthy consultation; the marquee on the Fields; two public meetings. The final documents were, at last, posted on the Council website after adding amendments raised when the Vision was reported and accepted at the East Area Committee in July.

It has been agreed that a Management Group for the Fields should be created to include residents, officers and users. Greenspace have no funds during this financial year to take the project forward; a Management Plan must be established so that funding can be raised. The HFA will continue to encourage a progression of the Vision.

Martin Jones

Feel Safer around Highbury Fields?

You should, now that the Highbury East Safer Neighbourhoods Team are fully up to strength, with three Police Officers and three Community Support Officers working on our ward.

The team's role is to provide a visible, accessible and familiar police service whose aim is to work with the local community, to identify our concerns and to create lasting solutions to perceived problems. They are *additional* to other police units and, we are assured, will not be taken away from the ward or assigned to other duties. But they are not there to deal with emergency calls which should still be directed to 999.

Priorities: Surveys (including public meetings) suggest that residents' principal concerns are: street robbery, burglary, assault, vehicle crime and anti-social behaviour by young people, including harassment and vandalism.

Some of these can be tackled by improvements to policing (more bobbies on the beat, use of CCTV, quicker response times); others need help from the Council with, for example, better street lighting, cleaning and maintenance of streets, traffic controls. In one instance during the past year, the Highbury East Team alerted local householders to a spate of burglaries in their neighbourhood and described those suspected of being responsible.

Practical solutions: Safer Neighbourhood Teams work flexible shifts; much of their time is spent patrolling their wards. In our case, they carry out proactive patrols in Highbury Fields (which have led to arrests for attempted robbery). They have made some recommendations for environmental improvements which resulted in improved lighting and raising the tree canopy in the north of the Fields by the sports pitches – thus improving safety and helping to reduce the fear of crime in the area.

Other initiatives by the Team led to the installation of an additional CCTV camera in Fieldway Crescent to reduce anti-social behaviour in the area around the Central Library. They are also working with the Council and Barclays Bank to tackle the ongoing problem of begging outside the bank in Highbury Place.

Working together: To provide liaison with the local community, each ward has a panel representing local residents, organisations and businesses, and includes local councillors. The Highbury Panel has had two meetings so far and plans more in the near future. The HFA is represented by one of our Committee members, Paul Williams; and another, Victoria Ellington, represents the Roundhouse, and is particularly concerned with the provision of services for youth in our neighbourhood. If you have any comments you would like raised at future meetings, please contact either of them.

Contacts: The Team are keen to hear from residents and businesses in the Highbury East ward.

Ask for:

Police Sergeant Colin Francis or:

Police Constables Gareth Kinch and Dave Farrelly

To discuss an on-going local problem, contact the Team at: The Safer Neighbourhoods Team Base, Compton Road on 020 7161 9385

or via the Team landline: 020 8721 2665

To report an incident, contact Islington Police Station through 020 7704 1212

Geoffrey Adams

The Birth of Highbury Fields

In 1885 the Vestry of the Parish of St Mary Islington (the forerunner of the Council) and the Metropolitan Board of Works shared the huge cost then of £60,000 to buy the land that was to become Highbury Fields. The Act of Parliament that year stated: "*Subject to the provisions of this Act the Board may appropriate and maintain in the Parish of St Mary Islington as an open space to be dedicated to the perpetual use thereof by the public for exercise and recreation as by this Act provided the lands known as 'Highbury Fields' (and which are hereinafter referred to as 'Highbury Fields') which are delineated on the deposited plans...and shall hold and maintain Highbury Fields as and when they obtain actual possession of the same for the perpetual use thereof by the public for exercise and recreation...*" On 24th December 1885 there was a great celebration when Highbury Fields were declared **"open to the public henceforth and for ever"**.

Martin Jones

The Future for Trees on Highbury Fields

In last year's Newsletter I wrote about the significance of the avenues of London plane trees for Highbury Fields, doing so because the trees had not emerged as an outstanding precious feature of the park in *A Vision for Highbury Fields*, then under preparation. There is some good news on this.

Many Councillors know Highbury Fields and are interested in the subject. They took a number of suggestions Bettina Reiber and I put to them, supported by the Highbury Fields Association, the Highbury Community Association and several individuals. At the July meeting of the East Area Committee that ratified *A Vision for Highbury Fields*, Councillors agreed several amendments adding recognition of the value of these trees, in particular giving some very clear guidance on how the trees should be regarded by those who will be looking after them in the future. The Councillors were unanimous that the Vision should include a statement that the London plane trees forming the avenues should be protected from a policy of felling healthy trees and replanting with young trees, a possible strategy for long-term maintenance of the avenues that has been a concern during the last year or more. However, while several of the Committee's amendments were incorporated into the final version of the Vision document as it appeared on Islington's website in August, other amendments – including the statement about the London plane trees that “a policy of felling and replacement should not be adopted” – did not find their way into the document. As a consequence of Councillors John Gilbert and Terry Stacy being made aware of the omissions, the Vision document is being corrected and Greenspace says it should be available on Islington's website by the time this article appears.

While awaiting the final outcome, we realise that had it not been for our engaging a respected arboricultural consultant, John Booth, to present two reports on the plane trees it is doubtful whether we could have made our voices sufficiently persuasive to see the Councillors take a decision to amend the Vision in this way. Although we and many other local people regard it as just common sense that these trees be well looked after over the coming decades, and that this be a stated objective at the outset of the Vision, it has become

clear that engaging an expert is a requirement under such circumstances. Engaging consultants may become an increasingly important way for community groups to support their interests.

With the current enthusiasm for CCTV cameras, it's not just felling that is a threat to larger trees. CCTV encourages aggressive pruning in the name of safety, treating trees as just another consumer item; it has the effect of leaving us with stark tree trunks that are visually undesirable and depressing.

Highbury Fields Association has already made representations for the Vision on this problem: “It is clearly established that Highbury Fields is not a ‘crime hotspot’. The only relevant call for CCTV cameras is to monitor the movement of fans on match days. The suggested placing of a camera close to 39b Highbury Place is strongly resented by the residents there and has not been properly consulted ... The beauty of the trees is at least partly that they sweep down. Heavy pruning and crown lifting is ugly”



The war memorial viewed from Highbury Corner

Another, different case for taking a chainsaw to lower branches comes in the Vision's suggestion that crown lifting be applied to the trees on the broad walk running beside Highbury Place, at its southern end, such that a clearer view of the war memorial would be obtained under the foliage when approaching from the north. The war memorial is designed to face south, of course, away from the broad walk and towards those entering the park from Highbury Corner. Thus the branches of

the nearby trees around its sides and rear create an appropriate leafy backdrop against which the fine sculpture is set. This ensemble creates a vision of quiet seclusion. Cutting off the lower branches is likely to result in a loss of the special sense of place that this small grouping provides. I see no benefit to be gained for those approaching in the opposite direction by exposing the back of the monument or the rear wall of Barclays Bank against which it would be seen. When walking down towards Highbury Corner I much prefer looking at the successive screens of leaves doing what comes naturally to them, hanging down over the pathway.

The Vision documents ratified by the East Area Committee in July are only the first phase in quite a complex range of policies, proposals and a master plan that will be drawn up to enable bids for funds to resuscitate Highbury Fields. The next stages in the preparation of the Vision include the drawing up of a business plan, a management and maintenance plan and a long-term tree strategy which will cover issues such as the felling of trees in some areas, the planting of new trees and different approaches to pruning; each policy and practice suggests the possibility of having a considerable impact on the nature of the Fields.

I understand there will be further consultations as these documents develop, but details of who will be consulted and how, have yet to be released. As the ideas for the Fields are fleshed out, it is most important that local people and all those who use Highbury Fields should take a keen interest in a process that will probably have a real and noticeable effect on our local park. The Vision has set out a range of topics for examination and development; the working up of final proposals offers a unique opportunity for local people to guide the Council on how they would like their park to be improved.

Robin Hull

Football Fans and the Desire Line

Well before the Emirates stadium was even started the HFA was predicting one of the inevitable effects. Football fans that have walked for generations from Highbury Corner up Highbury Place to the old stadium would walk, in large numbers, in a diagonal line across the Fields to get to the new stadium. Not rocket science – a glimpse at the map confirms it. And, that thousands of footfalls in the course of a season would cause considerable wear to the turf.

The Council were eventually persuaded, a year ago, to conduct a brief trial of barriers, with the aim of preventing any access to the Fields before or after a match. Arsenal grudgingly footed the bill for hundreds of barriers, and dozens of stewards to man them. It was noisy, ugly, prevented the enjoyment of the Fields for others and was strongly resented by the fans.

By the end of the season, thousands of fans had indeed crossed the Fields and, as predicted, there was considerable damage to the turf on a broad swathe across the main field. We persuaded the Council to conduct a much reduced trial of a few barriers at each end of the 'Desire Line', which did manage to divert the passage away from the most damaged areas. Arsenal refused to pay.

"Parks are the lungs of London"

William Pitt

There had been precise baseline examination of the condition of the grass and the subsoil before the 2006/7 season started, so that professional soil experts have been able to accurately measure the extent of the deterioration caused by compaction and have now drawn up a specification for turf renovation and regular maintenance. It is yet to be decided whether funds can be found to undertake such a programme. In the meantime fans continue not only to cram the roads, buses and stations in the borough but also to badly damage its largest park.

Martin Jones

Union Chapel

Looking north from Highbury Fields, the most notable landmark is the Tower of Union Chapel in Compton Terrace. Union Chapel is one of Islington's most important buildings, and one of the grandest surviving examples of a Victorian Gothic nonconformist chapel. It is listed Grade II*. It narrowly escaped destruction, first by wartime bombing, and then by an attempt in 1981 to have it demolished, and it now faces a new threat in that extensive repairs to the Tower are needed.

The chapel is the masterpiece of its architect, James Cubitt. He was a specialist in nonconformist churches with particular views on how they should be designed. He favoured an auditorium design, in which as many as possible of the congregation were able to see and



*December 1986; 18-20 Highbury Place.
Conversion from draper's shop to offices.*

hear the preacher clearly. In Union Chapel he put this idea into practice. The Chapel and the ancillary Sunday school, lecture hall, etc. date from 1877, with the exception of the Tower, which was only completed in 1889. The Chapel replaced an earlier and smaller chapel of 1806 on the same site. The imposing interior on an octagonal ground plan remains much as originally constructed, and the magnificent Henry 'Father' Willis organ is also little altered. It was built for a much larger congregation than it now has.

In the 1980's the Chapel began to revive, after a low point in its fortunes. The Friends of Union Chapel were formed, and a few years later the Rev. Janet Wootton became minister. She had a firm commitment to the preservation of the buildings and finding additional uses for them, and much was achieved under her leadership.

The current minister is Fionnaigh Reid. There are services every Sunday at 11 am. It is a member of the Congregational Federation. Lettings for concerts, rehearsals, etc are managed by Union Chapel Project (a management company owned by the congregation), and there is a homelessness project. Details of the various events are at www.unionchapel.org.uk. The Friends of Union Chapel is a registered charity which enables people not in the congregation to support the Chapel in various ways, including volunteer work days and sorting and cataloguing the Chapel's fascinating archives, as well as donating money. Members are kept informed of developments by newsletter.

The congregation's fund raising and repair campaign, with a substantial help from English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund, achieved as a first major step the re-roofing of the Chapel in 2005-06. Now the Tower needs a substantial sum spent on it and even more needs to be



Recent further conversion to family houses.

raised from donations, and more quickly, than in the case of the roof. If you can, please help!

If you would like to become a Friend of Union Chapel please get in touch with me (I am the hon. treasurer) at 112 Calabria Road, N5 1HT.

7226 2145 richardwallington@tenoldsquare.com

Richard Wallington

Whistler Street Conservation Area

There has been an initial round of consultation to designate the street as a Conservation Area which was approved by a majority of residents and passed by the East Area Committee. Alec Forshaw has prepared draft Design Policy Guidelines for further public consultation. He said that architecturally, it is a rare surviving example in Islington of a type of housing which was largely cleared away by post-war redevelopment. It has a distinctive character and appearance which is special for Islington, and worthy of preservation and enhancement.

The street was built as speculative housing in the early 1880s, known originally only as "off Drayton Park" but named, apparently, after James McNeill Whistler, the American painter and socialite, who had settled in London. The two-storey houses are built of traditional yellow London stock brick, some with red brick dressings for window arches and string course between ground and first floors, some with rendered window arches and projecting ground floor bays. Generally the properties are 'handed', that is with pairs of adjacent front doors. This in itself is quite uncommon for Islington, and more reminiscent of north-country bye-law housing.

Maryse Jones

Wake-up Call for Parents

We have all hoped to send our children to good local schools in Islington. It does seem to be a problem.

I went to a Conservation & Design Panel meeting where plans for both Highbury Grove School and Hilldrop Road were discussed. The plans put forward for their 'redevelopment' were so disheartening that words failed me! I checked with my daughter (who taught at Holloway Boys School for 15 years) to make sure that I wasn't over-reacting. To me they looked like, at best, two uninspired supermarkets – down to a price, rather than up to a standard.

How can we send the next generation to schools that, apart from anything else, have no aesthetic sense or standards? Has anyone canvassed the views of the staff? Has anyone canvassed the views of the children? How about the locals?

The other daunting matter is that both schools are by the same architects on different sites but both equally disappointing. There are many good careful architects who do wonderful schools where the buildings have been thought through and the needs of the pupils really focussed on. I think I can safely say that all of the Panel were appalled by what they saw. Surely we must invest in the best to get good results from schools.

I suggest that if you care what happens to the next generation go and look at the plans. I hope I am wrong! – but hurry up, no doubt they will be rushed through!

Jeannie Burnett

Confessions of a Justified Swimmer

Are you,' asked Dr Somerville, 'a kangaroo?'

I had to admit I was not. Lying in a hospital bed with a tube in my nose, another going into my bladder, and a general post-operative ache in my chest, I didn't exactly feel human either.

'Well then,' said my cardiac consultant, Professor Jane Somerville, with that steely firmness that used to send

junior doctors palpitating for cover, 'why would you want to go *jogging*?'

I was not quite sure I saw the connection. After all, I was not suggesting my recommended daily exercise should take the form of pogo-dancing or trampolining. But then in a sense she was right – jogging *is* a rather fatuous bouncing kind of exercise. Perhaps not as fatuous as the scenes-from-Hades gym, with its infernal Sisyphean pushing machines, its Tantalising pec-stretchers and Promethean belly-breakers... and all to the sound of industrial disco. (Who need believe in Hell when we have the gym?) But rather fatuous all the same.

What about tennis? Ideal – if I could find a partner prepared to put up with my pancake-tossing parabolas and fly-swatting net-tremblers. (Oops – sorree!) Cycling, then? Great – but not in London, where, these days, it's more risky than open-heart surgery.

That left swimming, which was fine by me. I liked swimming. I could even do it quite well. And if one is lucky enough (as I now do) to live within a few minutes walk of an excellent public facility such as Highbury Pool, what could be more convenient? Dr S. approved. The angiogram had said 'operate' and an operation had duly been performed. I now had a brand new (well second-hand actually: God bless you, donor, whoever you are) pulmonary valve and if, lying in my hospital bed, I didn't yet feel like a million dollars, at least the equipment around me, with its wavy-lined screens and occasional blips as my heart-rate dipped, could not have cost very much less.

That was eleven years ago. For a while, after I had recuperated from my operation, I adopted a nice little routine at the pool: three or four times a week (roughly every alternate day) I was in at 7.30am and out at 8.15. I was one of the regulars and I soon got to recognize the others, by sight at least. We were in, up, down, and out: strictly focussed on our quotas of lengths: total lap dogs.

I used to categorise the other regulars by type, certain types belonging naturally to one of the three different lanes. There was the "Tractor", who churned up the water in the slow lane with no perceptible effect on forward movement; the "Volvo-driver", who hogged the fast lane (no, you *can't* overtake); and the "Morris

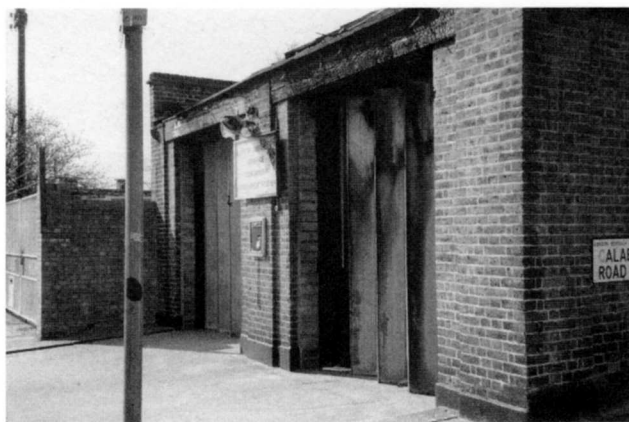
Minor”, who trundled along in third gear in the middle lane while everyone huffed and puffed and overtook one by one.

Then there was the “Ancient Mariner”, who’d been coming regularly since the Blitz, and spent twenty minutes in the water and forty afterwards reminiscing with the other regulars. There was the “Meteorite”, who dived in over your head, made a terrific splash and cratered the water, threatening us dinosaurs with extinction. And there was “Butterfly Boy”, with his red goggles and shiny blue helmet, who did his stretches and bends by the poolside, then hopped in, waited for a gap in the queue, and then catapulted himself up the fast lane windmilling his arms and bucking his belly, like a wave-hopping hydrofoil.

Finally, there were the earnest ones with their polystyrene floats, who had to do so many lengths like this, for the legs, and so many like this, for the arms, and then switch strokes every ten lengths – breast, back, crawl; da capo – till they hit the magic number. Myself, I was a 40-a-day man. Lengths, that is. At 25 metres that’s a nice round kilometre. (I’m all for European harmonisation – it’s a good deal less effort than going the old mile.)

The advantage of the pool is, of course, its predictability. You know how far you’ve been and can get out, exhausted and satisfied, when it’s done, and know there’s hot tea and porridge to come. And whatever the temptations during the rest of the day – that lunchtime pie and pint, that tea-time bun or extra helping at dinner – one has at least done one’s lengths. One has taken the cardiovascular system for its recommended spin. One has earned the right to a little indulgence, from the doctor if not the Pope. One is, in short, justified.

In summer sun, the sea may beckon. Eschew it, I say, or beware. Fun though it may be to splash around, it’s not the same. And the effect on your appetite – from the wind and the cold and salt sea air – is totally disproportionate to the energy consumed, since there’s no way you’re going to swim the same distance as you would have done in the pool. In fact, all you’ve done is to run in shouting ‘Last one in’s a chicken!’ then ‘Eek, it’s freezing!’ then ‘Yuk, seaweed!’ and then splash around in the shallows a bit or, if really



The old Ambulance Station on the south-west corner of Calabria Road and Corsica Street (top) before replacement by town houses.

determined, thrash up and down for ten minutes (only to get out half a mile further down because of the sweeping current) and then race back up the beach, shivering, for another session of beach-blanket bashing and ice-cream demolition.

That said, a swim is always better than no swim. Or as a friend of mine once put it – as we tiptoed goose-pimpled across the sharp shingle of a Sussex beach into that freezing snot-green soup – ‘you only regret *not* swimming.’

My reply? ‘Aaargh!’

But he was right. It was worth it afterwards. It was worth it because I’d *done* it. I was justified. (Hot tea and porridge, here I come!)

Times have changed and I now have a different routine. The pool is still there (indeed it has just enjoyed a major revamp) and I am still here, but the routine I once followed so slavishly has been displaced – like so many other things – by Parenthood.



St Paul's Road, seen from the then Highbury Corner T-junction with Upper Street, before the end houses of Compton Terrace (just seen on the right of the picture) were destroyed by a flying bomb on the 27th June 1944, to be replaced eventually by the roundabout.

New routines took its place. For quite a while it was the morning bottle feed, with audiobook accompaniment. Then there was the fresh fruit juice and banana-mashing phase: the alternating spoonfuls, one in the baby's mouth, one flicked onto the floor. Then the toddler TV service became part of my morning ritual, and I could have done a PhD on subjects as arcane as Noddy's Pivotal role in Village Life, or the Some Variations on the Narrative Twist in the Tweenies' Storytime Section. Later there were trips to the playground in the Fields, musical sessions at the Roundhouse, and the playgroup at Christ Church.

In all of this, working freelance at home a good deal of the time, and sharing the tasks of parenthood with my wife (while she studied for her MBA), it would have been perfectly possible, sometimes at least, to visit the pool by myself and put away a few lengths. The truth is, I'd gotten out of my routine, and having broken the habit I found it hard to summon enough enthusiasm for the occasional one-off session. Besides, I was – and am – now in a different routine, one that fits in perfectly with walking my daughter to school, and with spending more time in my office: I

walk to work, from Highbury to Holborn, listening to audiobooks on my i-pod. (This is brilliant, by the way. Shank's pony is free and never goes on strike. I can catch up on the classics; study a language, or when my energy flags give myself a quick blast of noisy rock to quicken my pace.)

Recently, though, I have gone back to swimming. And it's all because that same daughter, whose arrival upset my earlier routines, is now having swimming lessons at Highbury Pool. While she learns, I do my laps in the lane. I may not be the lap dog I once was – parenthood does no wonders for your fitness – but I am at least putting in the lengths. And at the end of each session I once again feel that glow of muscular exhaustion and cardiac stimulation. Dr S. would approve.

I feel, in a word, *justified*.

Paul Magrath

'The Great Stink' of 1858

How many Londoners know that the Victorian sewers that still carry thousands of gallons of effluent to treatment plants around the city owe their construction to the popularity of the flush toilet? The London sewer system, one of the great engineering feats of the 19th century, came about because of a crisis involving new flush technology. This was one of the many points to come out of a lecture on the 'The Great Stink' which took place at the Highbury Roundhouse on 16th June. It was delivered by Professor James Malone-Lee, director of research and development at the Whittington hospital.

Prof. Malone-Lee told the audience about the various water-borne diseases that have affected humans over the centuries including two cholera epidemics that swept through London in the mid 19th century, killing an estimated 25,000 people. At that time, it was thought that cholera was borne by foul air so the danger of spewing gallons of untreated waste into cesspits on the street was not recognised. Water closets really started to catch on after they were demonstrated at the Great Exhibition of 1851. The volume of waste emptying into the streets increased accordingly. Although a London physician, Dr. John Snow, advanced the opinion that cholera was not caused by foul air but by contaminated water, it took some time for this theory to become accepted.

Meanwhile, 'The Great Stink' of 1858 finally goaded Parliament into action. A combination of intense heat and untreated sewage in the Thames became so unbearable that the House of Commons nearly relocated to Hampton Court to avoid the smells. A Select Committee investigated the Stink and Parliament passed an Act enabling a comprehensive sewer system to be built.

The designer of this system was a civil engineer named Sir Joseph Bazalgette. He proposed constructing miles of underground brick main sewers that would intercept effluent from even more miles of street sewers. Fortunately, he designed the pipes wide enough so that there was capacity to handle the much larger populations of the future.

Despite the topic, the audience enjoyed a delicious meal accompanied by wine. This was the first in a

series of such events. The lecture was organised by a joint committee for the Whittington and the Roundhouse. It raised £1,000 towards the cost of expanding the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit.

Victoria Ellington

On Saturday, 10 November 2007 Whittington radiologist Dr Ben Timmis, will give a lecture at the Roundhouse about the invention and future of the CT scanner – and how the Beatles' success contributed to this. Tickets, £15 a head (including food and chamber music) in aid of the Building for Babies Appeal from the Roundhouse, 020 7359 5916 or from Bronwen Taylor, 020 7226 7240.

HIGHBURY FIELDS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Martin Jones, *Chairman*
Anita de Lotbiniere,
Membership Secretary
Maryse Jones, *Treasurer*
David Boniface
Jeannie Burnett
Victoria Ellington
Muriel Feder
Kate Hodgson

Carrick James
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Paul Magrath
Nicky Manby
Tony Miller
Jennifer Purchase
Caroline Russell
Paul Williams
Nicholas Witter

Ginny Worsley
Octavia Jennings
(co-opted)

Nominations for new members (proposed and seconded by members of the HFA) should be made to Martin Jones (see above) by Friday 26th October. Appointments to the Committee will take place at the AGM on 29th October. Please advise the Membership Secretary if you wish to receive Minutes by email.

Members of the Association are welcome to raise and discuss any particular concerns they may have. Please telephone Martin Jones.

Editors: Martin & Maryse Jones