Highbury Fields Association

Founded in 1971.

Affiliated to Living Streets - Islington
and the London Forum
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Newsletter - October 2006

Chairman's Report

It's OK to be a Camby

People are often criticized for being a 'Nimby'. 'Not in my Back Yard' is usually a negative response to a proposal that might be acceptable to someone, just as long as that someone is not personally affected. The Gherkin building? – yes, fine in the City, but, please, not at the end of my garden.

But it must be OK to be a Camby, - isn't it? 'Concerned about my Back Yard'. The OUP dictionary defines 'concerned' as 'troubled, anxious, interested, and involved'.

The HFA was originally founded simply to help preserve the fabric of the Fields: trees, grass etc. We continue to play an active watching role: maintaining a dialogue with Greenspace and Ward councillors. For many years now we have tried also to help preserve the fabric of the streets around Highbury so that new buildings fit in with and enhance the Georgian and Victorian architecture of the area.

We have continued to be both troubled and anxious over a number of issues this last year. We have to be continually on our guard against developers who frequently try to cram far too much on sites and we as an Association and other residents have taken immense trouble to express our anxiety, for example about the threatened overdevelopment of the Aberdeen Works site, off Highbury Grove.

What has been proposed for the site, in a series of plans and further revisions is the equivalent of building a Gherkin in Highbury – Yes, the site should be developed, but with style and less greed; yes, large buildings, but not so they loom closely over neighbouring Victorian houses and streets. Robin Nicholson, our speaker at last year's AGM, writes elsewhere in this Newsletter on the vexed question "What is good design?"

Similarly we are dismayed that football fans, coming and going to matches in the new stadium are starting already to damage the grass and disrupt the enjoyment of the Fields. I counted 2000 making the diagonal crossing after the Brazil/Argentina game.

Arsenal, the police and a lot of concerned residents have been monitoring the effect of the movement of

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AGM

On Monday 23rd October 2006
At Christ Church, Highbury Grove, London N5
7.30 for 7.45pm

Guest Speaker: **Johanna Gibbons**, Director of J&L Gibbons, landscape architects for the *'Vision for Highbury Fields'*, will speak on improving parks in Islington.

Can we allow this 'Desire line' ...

...to become as bad as this?

fans before and after matches. We and other groups have predicted for years before the stadium was built that it would bring chaos to the streets and that public transport could not cope. Now we are counting heads and taking photographs for the Review the Council has promised after the first five matches.

Insofar as damage to the Fields is concerned, the police and LBI Transport have refused until now to accept suggestions that I and others have made to mitigate the damage to the grass by thousands of pairs of feet. It can only get worse in the wet weather. It is tempting to believe that they are only too pleased that some at least are not going via Holloway Road.

But we Cambys are not only troubled and anxious; we manage also to be interested and involved. We as a Committee have been involved and certainly interested in the evolving development of the 'Vision for Highbury Fields'. It has been very good to learn that some 700 people visited the drop-in at the marquee on the Fields on the two days in mid-September, to learn what might be on offer, discuss the options and contribute their opinions on what should and should not be done.

Those ideas and also the opinions expressed at the meeting at the Baptist Church on the 21st September will be incorporated in and help to give shape to the Final Draft of the document. Jo Gibbons of J&L Gibbons, the landscape architects for the Fields, this year celebrating their 20th anniversary, is to be our speaker at our AGM on 23rd October at Christ Church. She and her team have very nearly completed what I consider to be an excellent revival of Islington Green, opening it up as an attractive space people will want to use far more than previously.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter there is concern (trouble, anxiety) expressed at the speed of traffic in the Fields; the need for a rethink on the huge development at King's Cross and, from our Foreign Correspondent, deep concern about the falling standards he has noted recently in India.

Other writers are interested and involved in such diverse subjects as the future of the plane trees on the Fields; the pleasure of collecting mushrooms; the joy at the creation of a new Islington theatre and the enjoyment of orchestra rehearsals in the Highbury Roundhouse.

Please do come to our AGM. – They are always very pleasant occasions. The business aspect is kept quite short, the speaker will be very interesting, talking not only about Highbury Fields but how other parks have been improved, and there is plenty of opportunity to ask questions on that and other matters. And since we are concerned that you enjoy the evening, feel involved and interested, we provide some very good food and drink. No need for anxiety there then!

Martin Jones

Guarding our London Planes

Back in June, at the Baptist Church in Highbury Place, during the consultation meeting on the council's forthcoming "Vision for Highbury Fields", I saw a map of a tree survey completed this April which had been commissioned by the council's landscape architect consultants who are drawing up proposals for changing the Fields.

The survey map on display didn't feel quite right, and so began several weeks of fascinating research and exploration for my partner and me, involving many site visits and conversations with those responsible for looking after the London plane trees in sites such as the Royal Parks, the City of Westminster's Berkeley Square, in Manchester Square, in Camden and Grays Inn. These specimens, which are 100 years older than the ones on Highbury Fields, are all in good shape and show no signs of decline. Our research culminated in our commissioning a tree survey of our own by a leading arboriculturist, John Booth, who visited Highbury Fields in July especially to look at the avenues but also to address issues on the grading of individual trees raised by the survey done on behalf of Islington council.

We are very glad we did so: the council consultants' tree survey initially had given no consideration to the specific value of groups of trees – that is the avenues which many of the London plane trees form. Instead, they only concerned themselves with the value of individual trees examined in isolation. Our own tree consultant made it plain in his report that the avenues need to be considered and are protected precisely for the value thay afford as avenues. In fact, he found that our avenues on Highbury Fields are of such outstanding quality that they merit the highest grading for retention, with criteria ranging over arboricultural, landscape and historical and cultural features.

Now, it seems, major changes to the avenues are not being proposed. It is of course a different matter that some individual trees might be removed to be replaced with planes or to give appropriate room for the existing planes to grow, and thus bring back a sense of unity throughout the park.

Both arboricultural specialists agree that the individual plane trees are either in good or very good health and we do not need to fear that they will decline even within the next 100 years as a result of old age. Indeed, all the plane trees on Highbury Fields are still quite young, still entering maturity. The London plane came into being in the mid-Seventeenth century, as a hybrid created by crossing the American plane with the Oriental plane. The benefit was a tree species well adapted to living with pollution, doing well in a range of climatic conditions including the ability of mature trees to grow in dry conditions, with good resistance to disease, and the supreme benefits for an urban, amenity tree of having interesting leaves that create light, dappled shade, with varied forms of trunks and branches, attractive peeling bark and an engaging winter silhouette. As a consequence, London planes were planted in their thousands and are still growing strongly, even in the first major planting in London, in Berkeley Square, in 1789. The oldest tree of this species, now well over 300 years old was planted by Bishop Gunning of Ely sometime between 1675-84, and is still fit and well in the Bishop's Palace garden, along with two Oriental planes of the same age. In fact, no London plane has yet died of old age; the species itself is still so young, nobody knows just how long the natural life span of the London plane may be.

Mr. Chengappa, who runs a fascinating website devoted exclusively to the London plane, www.chengappa.demon.co.uk, says, "The oldest known trees show no signs of senescence, and no reliable figure for their old age has been established. However, the oldest known trees are often in full vigour, so their likely healthy lifespan can be expected to be in excess of 300 years". The experts I talked to all agree that nobody knows how old the London planes may become but think 300 years not unlikely. Unequivocally, they do not fell any of their plane trees in order to replant them with new specimens; they consider maintaining the trees to be the responsible way to protect our heritage and provide for current and future generations of park users.

The age of the great majority of plane trees on Highbury Fields, by contrast, can be little more than 120 years old because the park layout and planting

View of the bandstand and young trees, c1900-1910, courtesy Islington Local History Centre.

began in 1886, soon after the land was purchased by the forerunner of the Council as a measure to stop the rapid spread of Nineteenth century development from swallowing up the last open space in the area. The plane trees which are so prominently sited as a series of avenues around and across the park have a strong – critical, even – visual effect on the ornamental design of the Fields as a whole. The Ordnance Survey map of 1894 shows the layout largely as we know it today. A picture postcard in the Local History Centre collection, dating from around 1900-1910, shows the bandstand on the now Queen's Walk and immature trees nearby.

The avenues of trees are Highbury Fields' outstanding landscape feature and should need no apologia. They create this memorable setting and a park with a sense of style that complements the Georgian and Victorian architecture. It is these trees that have come down to us as the main representatives of that first, Victorian vision. They should be given a new lease of life in Islington council's forthcoming "Vision Statement".

As a result of the felling of the elm trees at the onset of Dutch elm disease in the 1970's the London planes now have the appropriate amount of space in which to develop as they come to maturity. Sustainability, in this context, means giving support to these tree-lined walks, possibly through better drainage and soil conditions, the planting of young planes in the larger gaps and the clearing, where necessary, of inappropriately planted trees that are hindering the growth of the larger planes. Old age, for the planes, is in the far distant future.

The public consultation process is not over. There are opportunities for your views on this issue to be heard. You could email them to Miffa Salter who is running the consultation, miffasalter@urbancanda.co.uk; or the Islington Council Greenspace officer: Stephen Crabtree, Stephen.Crabtree@islington.gov.uk; or HFA's Martin Jones, at jones.lassartesse@virgin.net. Better still, email all three of them.

Robin Hull

"I think that I shall never see,
A poem lovely as a tree"

Joyce Kilmer

What is good design?

Creating value through good design is better understood now and championed in some surprising quarters but we are none too comfortable discussing the finer points of architecture. We happily argue about the beauty of a mobile or a pair of trainers but too often just rubbish new buildings whether they deserve it or not. Despite the extensive guidance and the planning system's development controls, sadly in some parts of the country little effort is made by either developer or the local state to get better value for us all.

Buildings and public spaces provide the physical environment within which we live our lives and yet too often we don't get that lift that you get, say, on crossing Highbury Fields, seeing the long rhythmical terrace of Highbury Place under and through the great plane trees. The new entrance from the roundabout is a huge improvement as the railings and accumulated tat have been removed and a high quality shared surface for pedestrians, cyclists and cars provided. The challenge will be to stop new black and gold litter-bins, new camera poles and new signs appearing or the unregulated wanton excavation by privatized utilities.

Created in 1999, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is the Government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. As a Commissioner I am delighted that its influence has grown and that it has helped public sector clients and increasingly the private sector to be better clients and to raise awareness of the importance of good design. A visit to www.cabe.org.uk will enable you to look at the range of activities and the growing library of CABE's best practice advice.

The championship of design quality is central to our mission; so what is it? One of CABE's core activities is the Design Review of about 350 of the most significant schemes throughout England, each year. This summer CABE re-published 'Design Review: How CABE evaluates quality in architecture and urban design' which is downloadable from the website or available free by post, along with much other best practice guidance

Architects nearly always have three categories of client, the owner and funder, the users over a period of 30, 40, 60 or more years and us, the community; inevitably we each think our views are the most significant. However when you consider something like a new school, you can appreciate that briefing is even more complex and yet the school is one of the most important buildings in our communities and needs more time and skill than we allow. The Local Education Authority, the Head, the other teachers the new parent, the cook, the facility manager, the receptionist and the pupils all have competing demands and differing perceptions of what a school is.

Some of these complexities are captured in the Design Quality Indicator (DQI) Tool www.dqi.org.uk which was developed around a classical idea. The Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius determined that there were three inter-related dimensions to architecture; his Latin was translated in 1624 By Sir Henry Wotton as 'Commoditie Firmenes and Delight' which the DQI has re-translated as Functionality, Build Quality and Impact. The key is that these tried and tested fields are not absolute; rather they allow us to discuss the relative aspirations and attributes of any project at any stage from the initiation to occupation.

In Islington, we are blessed with a great urban heritage and relatively little damage from traffic engineers; today there is an increasing quantity of better designed buildings and spaces, some new, some recycled and certainly all need to be considered in their own particular contexts. For some the Arsenal Emirates Stadium is a disgrace but that is mainly a political response whereas in urban design terms inserting such a huge building into the surrounding city has been pretty neat.

Meanwhile the adjacent 1980's all-glazed Metropolitan University Library on the Holloway Road is dispiritingly unambitious and plain bad and the newly completed key-worker housing on Hornsey Street overlooking the railway is equally unsatisfactory. But the prize for uninspiring must go to the new Municipal Dump, also part of the Arsenal redevelopment, which makes you feel depressed instead of being rewarded for your necessary and virtuous activity in a contemporary cathedral, flooded with daylight and hope.

The excellent Islington Urban Design Guide, which provides a guide to urban design with many illustrations of buildings and spaces in the Borough, has been out for consultation; with luck it should spark many hours of discussion. Taken with the CABE guides and other Government advice, there is no excuse to do design badly. This is explored in a recent CABE booklet 'The Cost of Bad Design'.

There is however a whole new and urgent issue for our consideration, the impact of climate change. Buildings and the way we use them are responsible for 40% of the CO2 emissions, which we need to reduce by at least 60% world wide by 2050. At a stroke, all-glass buildings go from being a symbol of progress, ambition and wealth to symbols of arrogant irresponsibility. Nothing seems to be happening to rebuild the disgraceful Highbury and Islington Station; so, instead of repainting it, why don't we move the post-office to the vacant site opposite as an exemplary public building for a sustainable age with high quality key worker housing over it and make best use of our new granite shared surface in front?

Robin Nicholson, CABE Commissioner, lives on Highbury Place

Eyes for Islington

Members of our Association, and other readers of this Newsletter, are clearly already concerned about our neighbourhood, prepared to report problems and actively join in any discussion of local issues. Members regularly contact our Chairman to raise such matters and seek help from the HFA. A few years ago Islington Council created an organisation to promote such active concern and participation right across the borough "Eyes for Islington".

I still have the document dated July 2002 sent by Kevin O'Leary, Director of Environment and Conservation, welcoming volunteers willing to join. I quote from this, "*We want you to be just that, the eyes and ears of our streets, finding out what the local environmental problems are and letting us know. We then will do the rest as promptly and efficiently as we can*". A special 'Enviro Line' contact centre was set up for us to call, e-mail or contact by post; we were asked to give full details of any problem, and provide our Eyes membership number.

The document indicated "*what we want you to look out for*"; and the list included all the environmental problems that give concern. The document added "*feel free to let us know any other issues that are causing concern and we will do our best to tackle them or pass them on to someone who can*".

Over the years I have phoned the Enviro line many times. I can't honestly say that every time one phone call solved the problem; but one is always listened to courteously, and given a reference number to pin on the problem; and many times I have been called back by a Council Officer to report on progress. The system works. Moreover, over the last three years there have been a number of meetings to listen to our thoughts and experiences, and offer us advice. Most recently I was able to attend a full day's 'training', one of four such sessions offered from April to October.

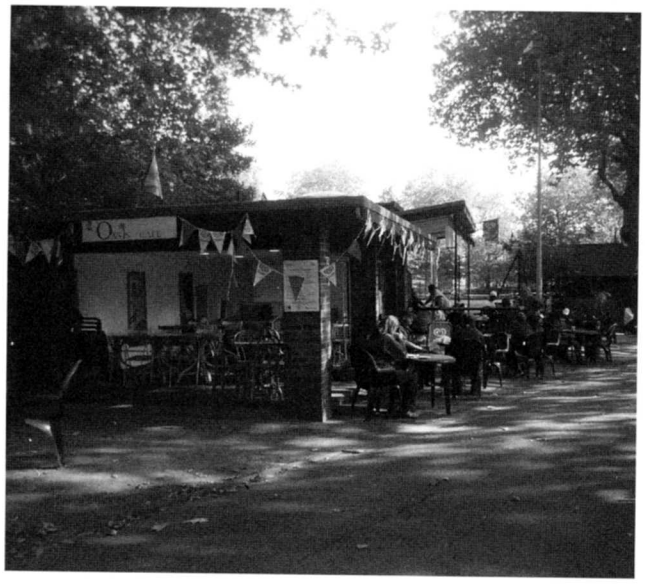
During the day there were a number of workshops, informal discussions and brief talks exploring a range of issues: *noise pollution, anti-social behaviour, abandoned vehicles, street sweeping, graffiti, anti-social cycling, dog-fouling* etc. and an introduction to the Metropolitan Police Safer Neighbourhood initiative. We were able to express our deep concerns, perhaps frustrations; and learn from Council officers and from each other about effective ways of approaching and coping with problems. Indeed it was particularly useful to meet about forty other 'Eyes' from all over the borough. We understand that there are now four hundred of us registered.

For more information about the scheme, log on to www.islington.gov.uk If you would like to become an 'Eye for Islington', ring Contact Islington on 020 527 2000. I would encourage readers to do so. I have found it a very positive organisation that makes me feel that I may achieve something useful, rather than merely grumble to my friends.

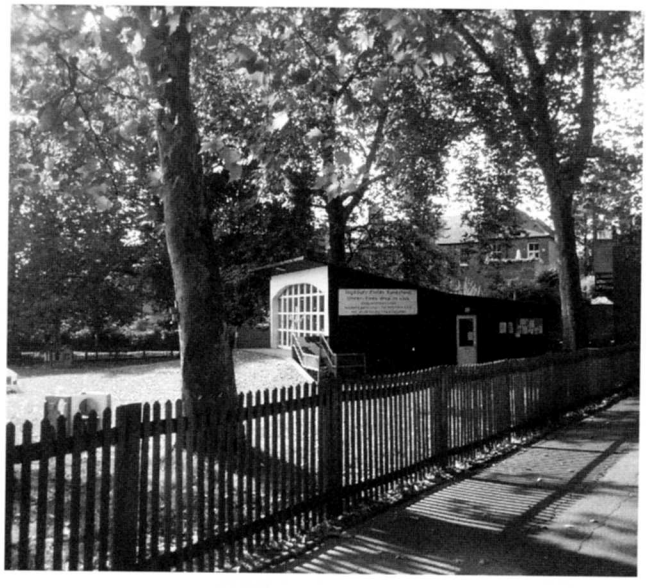
Paul Williams

The Glendale depot at the top of Framfield Rd.

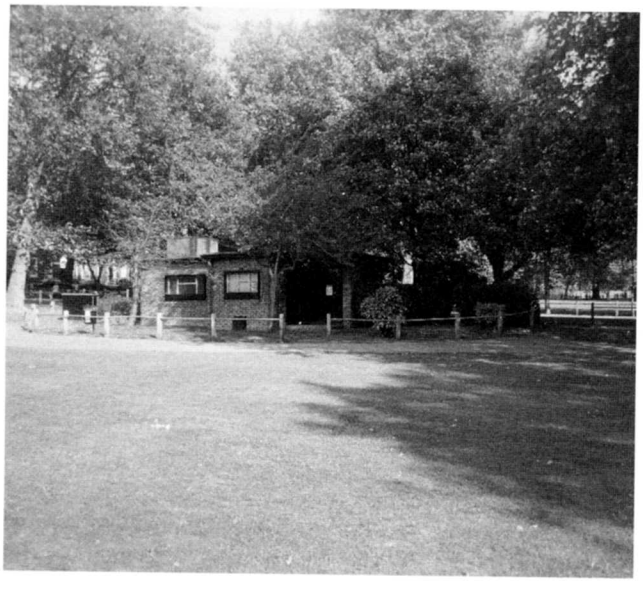
The redundant changing rooms



Oasis Café and tennis hut



The 2 O'clock Club



Redundant toilets in the middle of the Fields

Cottage and garden close to Highbury Grove

The Trooping of the Parasols

Why I'm a fan of the fungi

It's that time of year again: the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness... and mushrooms. Open season for us amateur mycologists, sniffing about in the undergrowth for those fabulous fruiting bodies. What's more, you don't have to go into the depths of the countryside to find them. London is full of them, and while some pose a menace to the gardener, and others the pain of a bad trip to A&E, a few will offer the prize of a gastronomic delight.

Regrettably, the ones I found last year on Highbury Fields did not fall into this last category. Small, pointy headed and secretive, like miniature monks congregating on a grassy knoll, they looked to me distinctly like *Psilocybe semilanceata*. In other words, that well known source of an LSD-like hallucinogenic, the "Magic Mushroom".

This year I have seen *Hypholoma fascilulare* or the Sulphur Tuft forming clusters at the base of trees or on dead stumps, and countless bracket fungi, *Polypores* or *Ganodermataceae,* shelving out from higher up on trees. One of these, *Ganoderma applanatum*, is known as "Artist's fungus" because you can draw on its pale cream-cheesy underside with a stick or other pointed object. Hampstead Heath is full of them, and numerous other fungi. And in Kenwood one year I found one of the better edible varieties, which happens to be the kind that first got me hooked on mycology, a decade or so ago.

I was spending the summer at a friend's house in Sussex when, ambling through the woods, I noticed them: a row of tall, slender mushrooms, with wide, frilly edged caps. They turned out to be *Macrolepiota procera,* colloquially (and rather aptly) known as Parasol mushrooms. I reverently left them where they were, but after beetling off to the village bookshop and being lucky enough to find a field guide, I returned soon afterwards to claim my prize. They were, the book said, "edible and good". Back in my friend's kitchen, this proved to be the case. The slender stems may not be up to much, but you can dip the entire cap (up to ten inches wide) into beaten egg and fry gently in butter for a delicious breakfast.

Paul Magrath with some of his spoils

Other gastronomic delights I have enjoyed as a result of my woodland wanderings include freshly-picked *Boletus edulis* (the most popular wild mushroom for cooking, known as *Porcini* in Italian, *Ceps* in French, or *Steinpilze* in German), peppery red *Russulaceae,* the delicate purple *Laccaria amethysta* or Amethyst Deceiver, the pistachio-green aniseed-flavoured *Clitocybe odora* and the pale apricot coloured and scented *Cantharellus cibarius* or *Chanterelle*. All of these can be fried simply in butter or oil, served up on toast or with fresh tagliatelle, or cooked in a creamy sauce to accompany grilled or roasted chicken.

Now whenever I go for a walk in the woods, especially in autumn, I make sure I have my trusty field guide and special mushrooming knife, with its short stubby blade one end and little cleaning brush the other. Though the prospect of finding something to eat adds a functional gloss to the enterprise, mushroom hunting is just as much about scientific curiosity. The many specimens I have spotted and annotated with cryptic location notes alongside their entries in the guidebook thus include, along with the edible varieties and a vast majority of harmless types, a number of those demonised with a little iconic skull-and-crossbones.

Of the latter, perhaps the *Amanita* varieties are the most spectacularly deadly. The white-spotted red "toadstool" seen in fairy-tale picture books is one of them; properly known as *Amanita Muscaria* or "Fly Agaric", its poisons, though not usually fatal to humans, were once used to kill household flies. (It was historically ingested as a pick-me-up by the "berserkers", those members of the invading Viking hordes whose descendants may be found among the rowdier end of the football fan fraternity.) But I have also spotted, on my fungi-finding forays, its far deadlier cousins *Amanita pantherina* ("Panther Cap"), *Amanita phalloides* ("Death Cap") and *Amanita virosa* ("Destroying Angel"), all of which are invariably fatal to humans but, to the untrained eye, could seem quite harmless. In this regard, I cannot stress too highly the importance of studying the books and learning what to look for. The shape of its gills (if it has them), the condition of the cap, its size and colour: all have bearing on the identification of a wild mushroom. The people who die of mushroom poisoning usually do so because what they thought was a "harmless-looking mushroom", not dissimilar from what you buy in the shops, turned out to be a killer.

A little learning is a dangerous thing, but none at all can be absolutely fatal.

It is perhaps for this reason that the British, unlike most Continentals, have always been suspicious – even superstitious – about what we inaccurately avoid as "toadstools". There is nothing new in this: the 16th century botanist John Gerard in *The Herball, or General Historie of Plantes* noted with disdain that "many wontons ... do hunger after the earthy excrescences, called Mushromes: whereof some are very venemous and full of poyson, others not so noisome; and neither of them very wholesome meate..." His puritanical suspicions cannot have been allayed by the appearance of the aptly-named *Phallus Impudicus* or "Stinkhorn", which is apparently edible when young and still egg-shaped, but ripens vertically into what Gerard robustly calls the "pricke mushrom" or *Fungus Virilis Penis Effigie*. (To save maidenly blushes, he prints the picture upside down). More recently, Richard Mabey, author of *Food for Free* (1972), noted that mushrooms "are the most misunderstood and maligned of all wild foods".

There are signs that this ancient prejudice may at last be giving way, and that the sport of wild mushroom hunting, once the preserve of lone fungibores like myself, is becoming seriously popular. A quango called English Nature has propounded a Code of Practice to regulate it. The National Trust has taken to banning the practice altogether over vast areas of its land, such as the New Forest, which are rich in mycological life. Supported by other bodies, such as the Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust, they now say it's a crime against the countryside, like picking wild flowers. In fact, picking is beneficial to the mushrooms: it helps to spread the spores and so increase the population. In any case, the edible ones are the dullest-looking; a spectacular appearance often portending a poisonous nature. (The mycological equivalent of the femme fatale, perhaps.)

Lepidopterists may break butterflies on the wheel of their obsession, while ornithology is in my opinion strictly for the birds. Give me, any day, the enchanted wood in autumn time, or a field full of feasts on a damp and misty morning. There will I smell out my supper, standing sentry beneath a spreading beech, or clumped at the foot of an oak, or trooping majestically up some mossy incline, like those invisible dignitaries carrying their broad but delicate parasols all those years ago.

In all there are some 3500 varieties of mushroom in the British Isles, the vast majority of which are neither edible nor poisonous. Of those that are poisonous, few are deadly; and of those that are edible, few are particularly tasty. But to find the ones that are: well, therein lies the sport.

Paul Magrath

An Evening with John Betjeman

Islington celebrates English culture.
7.30 pm on Sunday 8th October 2006 at Union Chapel, Upper Street. All Tickets £5.00
For information and tickets:
www.unionchapel.org.uk
Or at the door, or at 020 7226 8333

Through-traffic across Highbury Fields.

The need to control the speed.

Currently the network of streets around Highbury Fields, bounded by Highbury Grove, St Paul's Road and Holloway Rd has a speed limit of 30mph. The street network is an island of opportunity for reckless drivers to speed up in a sea of 20 mph limits. It seems quite extraordinary that Islington's largest green space used heavily by Islington residents from throughout the Borough should have to tolerate through traffic travelling at speed.

The arguments for 20mph limits are well rehearsed and endorsed by the Council in the ten year Sustainable Transport Strategy with proposal Prop TR1: "To establish 20mph as the speed limit in all residential areas through continued implementation of 20 mph zones across the borough". In this context it is unusual to find that drivers are still being encouraged to feel that 30 mph is an acceptable speed in the Highbury Fields area where there is such a high volume of pedestrian traffic. Furthermore, "prioritising the pedestrian" ranks highly in the plan for improving local open spaces in the A1 Borough strategy, of which the Highbury and Islington Hub (Highbury Fields to Highbury Corner) is one of eight key points.

There are two main vehicular through-routes through the Highbury Fields Street Network: One cuts from St Paul's Rd, via Corsica St, Calabria Road and Baalbec Road to Highbury Grove and the other cuts across the Fields (in both directions) from Holloway Rd to Highbury Grove via Baalbec Rd, Highbury Place, Highbury Crescent, Fieldway Crescent and out on to Holloway Rd via Horsell Rd and Ronalds Rd or in from Holloway Rd directly via Fieldway Crescent. Vehicles also cut through from Highbury Grove via Baalbec Road and Highbury Place to Highbury Corner.

There is a major pedestrian and cyclist route from Highbury Corner, via Highbury Place, Church Path and the clock tower to Highbury Grove/ Blackstock Road. For the most part this route is wide and safe for the volumes of pedestrian and cyclist traffic (of all ages) that uses it daily but there is a point of conflict with vehicles at the top of Baalbec Road. At this point, cars frequently fail to stop at the stop line and swing round left into Highbury Place and immediately right into Highbury Crescent. Cyclists in particular are vulnerable here as they travel from Church Path into Highbury Place and are often not noticed by cars which pull out dangerously in front of them forcing them to swerve into the oncoming traffic lane. Frequent near misses have been witnessed at this point and the almost weekly demolition of the beacon on the centre island by passing vehicles shows what poor control drivers have as they make the turn, indeed some vehicles even choose to pass to the right of the beacon.

Pedestrians are equally ill served. There is a very narrow section of pavement, wide enough to push a buggy but not wide enough for a buggy with a toddler walking alongside and certainly not wide enough to cope with two-way pedestrian traffic. Crossing Baalbec road to avoid the narrow pavement is not an attractive option as the road is very wide, there is no central refuge and cars swing round the corner fast in both directions.

Baalbec Road has a slight incline uphill towards the Fields, which appears to encourage drivers to rev and accelerate. If a section of two-way road ahead doesn't have room for two vehicles to pass, drivers will race to get into it before a vehicle enters from the other end forcing them to wait until the vehicle has got through. Drivers coming from Highbury Grove see the second part of Baalbec Road ahead and race to get past the Calabria Road turn before another driver turns in from Highbury Place. They then just keep going until they have to slow down before hitting the Highbury Crescent beacon. There is nothing in the streetscape that signals to drivers that this is a residential area and that they should slow down so that they approach the top of Baalbec road at a safe speed to meet the junction with Church Path/Highbury Place.

Highbury Fields is used both as a sports and recreation facility and as a route to school by the many children living in the area. Pre-school facilities include the one O'clock Club and the playgroup at Christchurch, Primaries include: Drayton Park, Laycock, Tyndale, Canonbury, St

John's and St Joan of Arc and Secondaries are Highbury Grove and Highbury Girls. Crossing Roads such as Baalbec Road at the junctions with Highbury Grove and with Highbury Place could be made significantly safer with a simple kerb realignment to narrow the crossing area and provision of a central refuge to allow pedestrians to cross the road in two stages.

The Highbury Fields "cut through" route from Highbury Grove to Holloway Road will be particularly affected by the proposed match day traffic control measures closing roads around the stadium. For the majority of Highbury residents (unable to travel west via Drayton Park) the only East/West route apart from main roads (Seven Sisters Road and St Paul's Rd) will be the Highbury Fields "cut through".

Urgent attention is needed to protect the users and residents of Highbury Fields, many often needing to cross the roads with young children, from the dangers presented by fast moving vehicular traffic. The new vision for Highbury Fields presents an ideal opportunity to address these issues in a creative way that could make the through-routes clearly into "places where people live", thus encouraging slow driving. This would mean instituting a 20mph limit, providing width constrictions at entry points and ensuring that entry routes clearly signal via the streetscape that the area values those on foot and that driving slowly is the only way to traverse the area.

Entry treatment is already in place in Fieldway Crescent, about to be implemented in Corsica St (through Canonbury School travelplan) but lacking in Baalbec Road. Entry routes have no traffic calming apart from a few humps in Fieldway Crescent.

Clearly Home Zones are expensive to implement, but it would be exciting to think that the vision for traffic speed control in Highbury Fields might be more creative than a few humps dotted around. The entry points to the Fields (Corsica St, Fieldway Crescent and Baalbec Rd) should set the agenda for low vehicle speed, pedestrian friendliness and a safe environment for the enjoyment not only of local residents but also the many residents from throughout the Borough who love and value the Fields.

Caroline Russell

King's Cross – think again

Community groups in King's Cross are launching a campaign to ask Camden Council to think again about Argent's massive proposed development. The development lies mainly within Camden, with the small Triangle site split between Camden and Islington.

In March Camden's Development Control committee gave provisional consent to outline plans for the huge scheme. In April, Islington's West Area committee gave provisional consent to the Triangle development, but with key amendments which reflected their concerns about its suitability for housing.

Now groups which raised objections are calling on Camden to think again before any final agreement is given. "*Camden Council can still reject the scheme as it is*" said Marian Larragy, Co-chair of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group. "*We all want regeneration, but this huge scheme with its bleak blocks, is not what the area needs – and we doubt its viability if it has to rely on these large offices. Instead of up to30,000 people commuting here, we need a new King's Cross which people will visit for its own sake. If we make the most of our heritage, as well as creating new work and business opportunities which draw on the enterprise of local people, we can have a development which will really regenerate this part of London. That's why we're urging Camden to think again*"

Working in a consortium of local groups, including King's Cross Conservation Advisory Committee, Regents Network, Cally Rail Group and members of Camden Green Party, the objectors are taking a close look at some of the major drawbacks of the plans.
The consortium's key demands include:
* Increasing significantly the ratio of housing to commercial space, as well as meeting London Plan targets for affordable housing, units for larger families and homes for wheelchair users.
* Stopping the planned demolition of irreplaceable Conservation Area buildings like Stanley and Culross Buildings, plus unique railway and canal architecture, to make way for new roads and office blocks.
* Creating a completely zero-carbon development, using renewable energy through-out, instead of a token handful of solar panels and wind turbines.

Jeannie Burnett

Western Influence

After about five years, I have been back to India on holiday and was shocked and surprised to notice how rapidly Indian culture has changed. In the main towns, people's spending power and attitude to spending and a western-style spending mania has increased. This dramatic change in the way of living and standards is due to the surplus, disposable income of a few rich and the middle classes.

What we reject here as junk food: crisps and fatty products and things we are cutting down on: alcohol, smoking, fizzy drinks and high sugar and high fat content foods are being pushed by many Western companies in India. Very attractive promotions are luring the public to such unhygienic and unhealthy products. They promise a new era of an easy life, with prepared canned products and ready-made products – 'What else do you want?' - the public hardly realise, or say, "Ignore the future health problems"

In Western countries, the public are made aware of hazards lying ahead by health institutions and the Government but in India nobody thinks about it. Here we have the NHS and people get the service free, although we have to pay National Insurance. However, in India, if you fall sick, you have to fork out a huge amount of money which the poor can hardly afford and junk food plays a substantial part in ill-health.

A distinction is that in the villages they live a simple life with the bare necessities, away from leisure and live therefore a healthy life. In my opinion I blame Western companies' influence in promoting such products and the Indian government's closed-eye attitude not to forewarn of the consequences.
I might get more surprises in five years time!

Harry Bhatt
Highbury Station Newsagent and HFA Member

East London Line

The two MPs for Islington have managed to persuade Transport for London that the East London Line extension, now under construction for completion in 2010, will terminate at Highbury & Islington station.

Football fans filling Holloway Road, walking back to Highbury Corner

A broad stream of fans crossing the Fields from Ronalds Road to Highbury Corner

The Miracle is Happening.

At last the premier aim of the Anderson's Yard Campaign Group, a theatre to replace the old Collins Music Hall at Islington Green, is within sight of realisation. The group was formed in 1989, determined that the Angel area would not have to suffer the building of another huge office block like the Royal Bank of Scotland headquarters building (which has now been empty for about four years). In the early days there were three 'Planning for Real' exercises, during which residents were able to indicate what they would most like to see on the site.

As chairwoman of the campaign for six years from 1991 I accumulated papers which are over two feet high, including eighteen newsletters, mostly written by myself. We collaborated with the then council in relation to the Planning Brief and the MP, Chris Smith, always took a close interest. Anyone could be a member of the campaign for £1 per year. For this they received information on coming meetings and news of successes in achieving our aims. What I learned was patience and a realisation there would be ups and downs, for example over the time taken. Since then there have been enormous changes, mostly for the better, in planning for the inner city.

Since the closing of the campaign in 1997, we had already seen the installation of Waterstones Bookshop. They spent an extra £250,000 on researching and reconstructing the frontage of Collins Music Hall as it had originally been before the fire in 1958.

There was a delay of three years before the Planning application for the theatre was considered by the Council, twice, in 2000, and at which I spoke on behalf of the theatre plan. Amazingly it barely scraped through the first time but, second time round, a little more light prevailed.

We are very fortunate in the residential developer Fairbriar and the theatre trust sponsor Robert Bourne and his wife, the very experienced theatre entrepreneur, Sally Greene, because it is almost impossible to build a new theatre nowadays, especially in London. It is an act of great courage and philanthropy as there are no grants and the seventy flats which will fund it are a one-off income.

They engaged the well-known architect, Piers Gough of CZWG who produced an excitingly imaginative scheme based on the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' theme. There will be income from the leases and from the restaurants around the huge new open space, a much needed gift to Islington.

It will be entered between two towers, which will contain the theatre services, off Essex Road, facing St Peters Street. Looking up towards the glazed canopy from this space will be like being inside a huge tree. A young architectural practice, Amin Taha Associates, which has won several awards, took over the supervision of achieving the whole concept with superb surface materials for the town space, columns surrounding it and the foyer which will be at 15 and 16 Islington Green.

Tolent Construction Ltd have been working on the site since May last year. The theatre shell, three stories underground, is finished and work on the crescent of flats above is starting. Fitting out the theatre is due to start on February 12 next year and take 36 weeks, so my long-time prediction of first performance at Christmas 2007 may very well come true!

Because Crossrail plans to have two tunnels running under the site by 2012, great care had to be taken to insulate the theatre from any sound transfer. There are to be some amazing features in the foyer, including restored Collins riveted metal beams. The space in the corners of the three theatre floors will house dressing rooms, a rehearsal room, offices and foyers.

I'd like to clarify some things. A name has yet to be decided and because a Collins Trust was set up to administer the business this does not mean the theatre will necessarily be called Collins. Every site to be developed is required to have an archaeological study. It was discovered that the Gaskin Street side of the site had contained a Victorian graveyard behind what, until recently, was a little Baptist chapel.

While it was not anything as hysterically exciting as a 'plague pit', it contained graves piled on top of one another because the minister had sold them over and over to make a profit. All the bones were removed ethically and buried in a graveyard outside London.

The Angel area has been a place of entertainment for at least 200 years and yes, there are other theatres here. Particularly over the last ten years, we have become known as the place to eat, especially for young City workers. No matter how many restaurants there are (around sixty from all over the world) they are full even on a Monday night and public transport is excellent. All this was rightly regarded as an indication of potential audiences.

There is one pledge in the planning agreement which particularly interests me having been an educationalist for thirty years. This is that all youth in Islington will be entitled, if they wish, to ten free performances, ten free drama lessons and ten free technical lessons annually. This means that the theatre will also be used during the day. At last Islington youth (particularly boys) will have something other than football to be involved in, which will be equally, if not more exciting and open up new worlds for them.

I know *Sally Greene's record as a theatre impresario and we should get an exciting and varied programme to suit all tastes. The Old Vic, which Sally owns, has a well-established record of youth involvement and I have attended matinees packed with schoolchildren. At the moment I am listing my huge collection of theatre programmes, starting in 1949, which I will donate as an educational tool.

Much is a matter of goodwill and a desire that this will be a success, something I have steadfastly held to for seventeen years. I do hope many in Islington will become Friends.

Avis (Saltsman) Baldry

*Sally Greene is now also owner of Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in Frith Street. *[Ed.]*

The London Medical Orchestra Comes to Highbury

People living in the area of the Highbury Roundhouse may have noticed unusual sounds emanating from the building on Tuesday evenings over the past few months. The explanation is that an amateur orchestra by the name of the London Medical Orchestra has taken residence. It was based in West London but had to look elsewhere due to rebuilding.

All I can say is that it is the best move we could ever possibly have made. It is friendly venue, spacious and with excellent acoustical properties.

I joined the London Medical Orchestra many years ago when I was a medical student. I had studied the violin to grade VII and had played in the local youth orchestra. Now, even after a gap of many years when I was working in other parts of the country, the thrill of playing symphonies and other major orchestral works is an integral part of my life. I don't even have time to watch TV.

The orchestra, which recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, was set up by a group of refugee doctors and dentists from Central Europe. Since then, it has raised huge amounts of money for medical charities. It has also played under the baton of a number of well known conductors, including Norman Del Mar, Sir Colin Davis and Bernard Keefe. Historically most players were medical in some way or the other but, while we still raise money for medical charities and even encourage medical people to blow the dust off their instruments and join us, our membership is as varied as any other amateur orchestra. We maintain the tradition of having a professional conductor. The current occupant is Michael Axtell, who was also the lead flute in the English National Opera Orchestra for 18 years. Our leader, Tina Bowles, is also well known on the London professional scene.

We play standard orchestral repertoire, which means overtures, concertos and symphonies, and have up till now held our concerts at St Giles' Church in the Barbican. A highlight in April was a concert of music by Mendelssohn which included his Scottish Symphony and the E minor Violin Concerto played by Thomas Gould. His performance could only be described as awesome! A name to watch out for in future. Next term we shall be playing Beethoven's Coriolan Overture, Brahms Symphony No.3 and Beethoven's Violin Concerto.

Daffodils

On Highbury Fields glow
Daffodils, row on row
In golden ranks arrayed.
In peaceful protest
Against the violent blooms
Of bomb and rocket
Blossoming in foreign fields.

Robert E Morley

The Highbury Roundhouse is also a charity that does a lot of good work in the community and during the short time we have been there we have developed a sense of partnership. Members of the orchestra have provided music for a number of activities including a ceilidh band for a Burn's Night, a string quartet for a wine tasting evening (until the Beaujolais got the better of us). Also we provided support for the Sunday evening string group when they held a musical soiree. We look forward to more local events in the future.

We always welcome new players, particularly strings or brass. If you play, (or used to play) what better way of spending Tuesday evenings (7.30 - 9.30) than to stroll over to the Roundhouse to join us in a Beethoven Symphony or two. We do not audition, but you need to be about Grade 7 standard, (strings less if they can sight-read fairly fluently).

For string players of a lower standard I recommend the Highbury Strings on Sunday evenings.

For information see our web site: www.lmo.org.uk
or phone Bronwen Taylor on: 0207 226 7240
bronwentaylor@clara.co.uk

For information about the Highbury Strings, phone William Ellington on: 0207 354 0397
ellingtonbill@aol.com

Dr Adrian Garfoot,
Chairman of the LMO Committee

Barn Dance
at the Highbury Roundhouse

The Highbury Roundhouse is hosting a Barn Dance for families and friends
Saturday 14 October, between 6.30-9.30 pm

It is an occasion to socialize with neighbours and dance to live music provided by the Highbury Green-Grass Scratch Band. Food and drink will be on sale.
Tickets cost £10 per adult if purchased in advance and £4 per child. Please call Bronwen Taylor on 7226 7240. Otherwise tickets can be purchased at the door for £12. Net proceeds will be donated to the Highbury Roundhouse.

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
Tony Jones

Ian Kelly
Randal Keynes
Liz Lydiate
Robin Mabey
Paul Magrath
Nicky Manby
Tony Miller
Jennifer Purchase
Caroline Russell
Paul Williams
Nicholas Witter

Ginny Worsley
Cas Nicholson *(Co-opted)*

Nominations for new members (proposed and seconded by members of the HFA) should be made to Martin Jones (see above) by Friday 20th October. Appointments to the Committee will take place at the AGM on 23rd October.

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

Editors: Martin & Maryse Jones