
THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2004/5

Once again it is my pleasure to present a report to the Annual General Meeting of the Society, which this year takes place on Tuesday April 12th, at 7.30 in the Town Hall. I have been doing this for longer than I intended, or than is perhaps desirable. My varied diet of voluntary and paid activities brings contact with the three ages of formal education and with groups dominated by the more settled generations. The only underrepresented group is the second quartile: the age that is under-represented within the Society and indeed in Islington as a whole.

This problem is not confined to amenity societies in areas with Islington's skewed population. However, that distorted age mix is something we constantly bear in mind when discussing local shops, transport provision, and housing development plans.

In the absence of an influx of new members, I am again indebted to the stalwarts. David Peel and Frances Balfour have kept the Committee running, Bob O'Dell has broadened the scope of our programme of events, Emma Gowers has maintained and enhanced the popularity of the Annual Dinner, and David Gibson and Jack Winkler have upheld the quality of the newsletter. Donald Mitchell has looked after the pennies and his stewardship of the accounts is reported here.

Our President hosts a monthly meeting at the Marquess Tavern and usually attracts an occasional member alongside the regulars. The meetings are at 9 p.m. on the first Tuesday of the month and the next of these is on April 5th. Another event before the A.G.M. is our trip to Hertford on Saturday April 2nd, setting off at 9.30.

Members are requested to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Society, on Tuesday, April 12th at 7.30 p.m. in the Town Hall Islington, for the transaction of the undermentioned business.

- 1. To receive apologies.**
 - 2. To adopt the minutes of the A.G.M. 20th April 2003.**
 - 3. To receive the Annual report 2004/5.**
 - 4. To adopt the financial report to 31st December, 2004.**
 - 5. To agree the levels of subscription.**
 - 6. To elect the officers of the Society.**
- (A full list will be provided at the meeting).
- 7. To consider any other relevant business.**

This will be followed **at 8 p.m.** with a talk by Harry Brack, "the story of the Packington". Harry was a councillor in the 1960s who opposed the Packington development and was subsequently vindicated both by events and in the *Crossman Diaries*. The future of the Packington is as topical now as when the Society was founded. We hope that some of the residents will come to hear Harry's talk and contribute to the discussion that follows.

Other forthcoming events

The Saturday routemaster trip to Hertford is on **April 2nd**. The itinerary is flexible and you can dip into some or all of the events organised. We leave Islington Green promptly at 9.30 and the cost is £5.

Events of 2004/5

The year opened with Dave Wetzel's talk about Land Value Taxation. As always, Dave was entertaining and enthusiastic. It remains a source of mystery that, for all his enthusiasm, so many people fail to perceive the distinction between Development Land taxes and Land Value Taxation. Dave convinced us that the latter is about capturing the added value of land when the value is added as a result of government action such as providing a railway station, and not about distorting the market under which development takes place.

At the A.G.M. we were asked to consider producing the newsletter in spoken form, i.e. an audio newsletter. I am grateful to Alan Turner, our Vice-Chair, for looking into this matter. We found that Disability Alliance Islington (DAI) was working on a similar idea, and concluded that the best way forward would be to contribute to their project. Their first bid for funding was not successful, but they are making another and are confident our support will help. We will keep members informed through the printed newsletter.

Our annual pub crawl in honour of the late Bill Manley again included three new venues and this year I am hoping to better that score. Bob O'Dell has embarked on a series of annual church crawls as a counterpoint. This is to view the architecture and the artefacts, not sampling the product.

We made two visits to the King's Cross Railway Lands after the first was over-subscribed. Roger Madelin is an enthusiastic advocate of what the developer, Argent (they have now lost St. George) plans to do and he has warmed to many of the existing structures on the site including to our great joy the Great Northern Hotel. He has still to be won over by Culross Buildings, though, and many local residents have still to be won over by the plans as a whole.

The outline planning permission submitted to Camden has not yet been determined. Given the volume of objections and comments received, this was always going to be a long process. More recently, I was

invited along with several other Society members to visit the P & O development on the Islington side of York Way. Although one or two details could have been bettered, overall it shows what can be achieved in an area rich in heritage by the effective re-use of old buildings for modern uses. It was a shame that none of Camden's officers were able to join this visit - not to gloat over what has been achieved in Islington, but to inspire them to greater things on the Camden side, which can more than match us for heritage buildings.

Another visit enjoyed by a select band of Islington Society members was that to the Building Exploratory in Hackney. Like the church crawl, we were indebted to Bob O'Dell for organising this event and indeed for finding this venue which I think it is fair to say adopts a low key approach to self-promotion.

We have held fewer formal meetings this year, partly because my supply of contacts has run dry and partly because they are less well supported than visits to places of interest. Many of our members belong to other organisations and there is little point in duplicating their efforts. As a corporate member of the London Forum, we are invited to its meetings which conveniently take place in Islington (at 77 Cowcross Street).

Interspersed amongst these events have been the monthly "Meet the President" sessions at the Marquess Tavern. We have continued to draw a small but varied audience at these events and have been able to discuss various issues and the Society's response to them. Those issues are described below.

City Road Basin: Tall Buildings

By the time this report is presented to the A.G.M., if not already, consultation will have ended on a second draft Planning advice note on tall buildings. The title has been changed to Building Heights and there is some good policy on the need to raise densities and the scope for achieving this along main roads without significant adverse visual intrusion. The document points out that this is often a more successful means than tall buildings, which need space around them. The criteria for

assessing the suitability of tall buildings are also sound. Unfortunately, the draft continues to include the whole of City Road, and indeed the whole of the Borough to the south of it, despite the lack of adequate public transport: the first criterion by which suitability should be assessed. The triangle site off York Way (the bit of the King's Cross Railway Lands in Islington) is also included, even though it could never be granted the highest level of public transport access. Even if York Road station were re-opened (and this seems remote indeed) the site would be hemmed in on two sides by railway lines, severely restricting access and egress.

Both of these areas are adjacent to canal basins. There are other grounds for wishing to see low rise developments here, but those set out in the text of this draft are sufficient to uphold local wishes. They are also consistent with the Mayor's London Plan, which contrary to popular belief does not place an obligation to build to the skies at any or every opportunity. We will have the chance to debate these issues with Islington's chief planner, Graham Loveland, on May 19th.

Olympic Bid

The Society has made no public pronouncement on the Olympic bid, although the rail improvements more likely to happen if it is successful will certainly improve public transport provision for us. CrossRail will not be in time for 2012. If the IOC likes the London bid, as is rumoured, but balks at the idea of voting for a country with so bellicose a first Minister, a 2020 bid would enable CrossRail to be built. Transport provision would then be an unqualified plus in the bid.

London forum events

The London Forum is experiencing very similar problems to ourselves in finding volunteers, and was unable to fill the post of Secretary at its A.G.M. Last year they nonetheless attracted several interesting speakers, and held a successful social event on the Thames. Their most recent newsletter includes a spotlight on the Islington Society.

Save the 73 campaign

I wrote last year about the campaign to save the 73 from the cost cutting changes that were made in September. From comments made either to me or to Dave Wetzel at the A.G.M. it is obvious that, while there will never be unanimity on anything, members feel more strongly in favour of the routemaster and the bus conductor and against the bendy bus than on any other issue.

Last year was the fiftieth anniversary of the first routemaster and in July a rally in Finsbury Park demonstrated the interest and enthusiasm that the bus has evoked. In September the bus industry marked the end of the 73 with the biggest show of support yet. Although the 9 and 390 routes were being axed on the same night, the advertised "last" 73 bus was a convoy of seven. The 19 is due to end on April 1st so that our trip to Hertford on April 2nd will be the only routemaster on Upper Street. Consultation on the 38 has recently ended, but as 1,000 people were ignored over the 73 fewer public protests have been raised this time.

Unlike the 19 and 38, the 73 has operated from the same garage for decades and consequently had a greater number of long serving bus conductors. Many conductors marked impending redundancy by decorating their buses, and it was their popularity that made the 73 such a cause celebre.

Many petitioners supporting the status quo also indicated a preference for double-deck opo buses over bendy buses. Others speak favourably of the smooth ride. All the bendy buses in London are currently under two years old. Transport *for* London have now admitted (or perhaps discovered from a visit to Leeds) that the life expectancy of a bendy is seven rather than twelve (or 50) years. Putting more of them on Essex Road will create a medium term headache for TfL as well as an immediate one for shoppers.

Save our Shops

Conflicting demands for road space have never been higher. When the Red Route was introduced in 1991, a recession meant

many traditional shops closed in Upper Street and the restaurant boom began. Conversely, their loss was to the benefit of shops in Essex Road. Parking enforcement was then minimal, but now the relative levels have been reversed. Cameras mean you can no longer gamble on nipping into a shop while the warden is elsewhere. Shop-keepers have been calling for short term parking bays, and happily, these have just been introduced, albeit after some debate with TfL who wanted to take a greater share of the road space to accommodate still more bendy buses. The new bays are on an experimental basis initially for six months.

Not everyone agrees with the traders. The idea that shopping for a loaf might cost a £50 fine is ludicrous. Once people have got into their car, the battle for choice has been lost to the out-of-centre supermarket. It is cheaper, it usually offers guaranteed free parking, and it sells everything under one roof. On the other hand, if deliveries cannot be made, or bulky and heavy goods cannot be collected, lack of parking space will undermine the local shop.

Some members feel we are swimming against an inevitable tide in campaigning for local shops. Many of us can walk to a supermarket. And whereas when I came to Islington, the Sainsbury's in Chapel Street bought in its bread, charged as much as the local baker and closed at 5.30, all of those advantages have been relinquished in the ensuing twenty-five years. The introduction of local Sainsbury's and Tesco's, though charging more than their major branches, do nonetheless offer relatively good value for money to those unable to drive or to travel long distances.

However, local shops contribute to a sense of community in a way that chain stores will never do. There is a significant group of people who want to live work and play within a small (walkable) area and where better than an inner city. It is a great testament to local shops, or the bingo hall, that ex-residents want to come back to them, but local shops cannot hope to survive on such customers. Most of them find a good local shop nearer at hand offering a similar personal service. Our local

shops need our support, and so we have signed up to the "Use them or Lose them" campaign.

King's Cross development

Most of the summer was consumed with consideration of the outline plans of Argent for redevelopment of the Railway Lands. Once the deadline was reached it soon became apparent that both the developer and the larger planning authority were taken aback by the volume of critical comment. There was too much office development, the density on the Islington triangle was inappropriately high, listed buildings were to be demolished, and the transport plan needed a rethink, including the proposed pedestrian and cyclist route over Camley Street. There were though some good points to commend and we did so: the way that many buildings were conserved, the scale of development on the main site.

The delay in considering the application has not been too disruptive to the developer. This is because a longer delay has beset the Northern ticket hall. This is the new entrance to the Underground station which will complete level access to all platforms and provide access to the development site. The developer made it clear this was a given when they took on the site, and that the development - any development - simply could not be made to work without it. Local voluntary groups endorsed this. After three months of being told good news was just around the corner, it was finally announced on the day the IOC search party landed in Britain.

The artists impression of the new King's Cross published shortly afterwards shows how the visual amenity can be transformed, the circulation space raised to an appropriate level, and the three listed buildings enhanced. How this circulation space was needed when phase I of the King's Cross works commenced, and shame on Railtrack for putting the interests of shareholders ahead of those of passengers and pedestrians, and on Camden for permitting the temporary planning permission to be extended year-to-year.

School buildings

David Gibson continues to represent us on the Conservation Advisory Panel. In the last year it has considered a number of planned conversions of school buildings to residential use, or in some cases, replacement of school buildings with new school and residential on the same site. A number of concerns arise. One is that the choice of school to be redeveloped may be influenced by the market value of its site, though this has been determined before the planning application comes before the CAC. Another is the loss of play space. Old buildings have a history and are a valuable educational resource, though they were designed before the digital age and there is an obvious superficial attraction in starting again with a cleared site. Finally, there is the concern that as higher densities take effect, the need to reduce school places will be overtaken by a shortage of spaces. There is already a projected surplus of places over children of only 2% in Islington primary schools, compared with for example 4% in secondary schools (before the creation of a tenth secondary school). Received wisdom is that 5% is the optimum figure.

Future of the Society

When the Executive was merged with the Planning, Conservation and Transport Committee a couple of years ago, the resultant

committee was larger than our constitution permits the Executive to be. Rather than exclude anyone, we appointed the office holders as an executive and the formal grouping was known simply as "the Committee".

Since then a number of members have found it necessary to stand down, because of other commitments. We are now at the point when it is desirable, if not essential, for us to attract new blood to the Committee. The demographic imbalance within Islington, mirrored within the Society, is even more evident when we examine the average age of the committee. We have tried to share out the jobs in manageable bite size chunks and if you might be able to contribute, however little, please consider putting your name forward for membership of the Committee at the A.G.M.

Annual Accounts

Draft annual accounts appear on the back of this report. Once again we have not produced as many issues of the newsletter as we hoped and this is reflected in a surplus. We have made strenuous efforts to meet the need for more newsletters. The result is an improvement in copy supply, but meetings to address the editorial need have still to reach the desired end.

Andrew Bosi

Forthcoming Society events

Tuesday May 3 rd , 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern
Thursday May 19 th , 7.30 p.m.	Towers of Babel or a response to the Government's agenda for a 'compact city'?
Tuesday June 7 th , 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern
Friday, June 24 th , from 6 p.m.	Annual Bill Manley Pub Crawl, commencing at the Lamb, Lamb's Conduit Street
Tuesday, July 5 th , 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern
Wednesday, July 6 th , from 6.30 p.m.	Annual Church crawl (in the north of the Borough, details to follow)
Tuesday, August 2 nd , 9 p.m.	Meet the President, Marquess Tavern

PUBLICATIONS ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR TO END DECEMBER 2004

INCOME

	2004	2003	
Bookshop receipts	414.43	1,277.81	
Direct sales	51.65	174.97	
Interest	<u>76.46</u>	<u>114.88</u>	
		542.54	1,567.66

EXPENDITURE

Postage		30.87	
Promotion		24.78	
Other	<u>22.10</u>	<u>0.00</u>	
		(22.10)	(55.65)
		520.44	1512.01

BALANCE SHEET

Opening cash in hand	4,120.26	2,608.25	
Repayment of long term loan	(2,000)	0.00	
Surplus from sales	520.44	1,512.01	
Closing cash in hand	2,640.70	4,120.26	
Comprising:			
Outstanding long-term loan	2,000	4,000	
Equity	640.70	120.26	

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
for the YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2004

		2004		2003
	£	£	£	£
Subscriptions Donations & Events	4,050		4,153	
of which Annual dinner £1286 (2003:£1300)				
Miscellaneous income (note 1)	290		127	
Interest receivable	56		29	
		4,396		4,309
Printing & distribution costs	717		1,029	
Meeting expenses	1,766		2,155	
of which annual dinner £1374 (2003: £1375)				
Miscellaneous expenses (note 1)	118			
Donations to other groups	115		50	
		<u>2,716</u>		<u>3,234</u>
(Deficit)/Surplus		1,680		1,075

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2004

Cash at bank	4,601		3,380	
Add: received in arrears	101		0	
		4,720		3,380
<u>Accumulated funds</u>				
Balance brought forward	4,720		3,526	
Adjustment to prior year accounts	101			
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	1,680		1,075	
Total (note 2)		<u>6,382</u>		<u>4,601</u>

(Signed) Donald Mitchell, Hon. Treasurer

Notes:

1. Includes VAT refund of £290 and expenditure of £76
2. Split between current and Instant access business accounts

Registered charity number 261143

