

# THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2005/6

Once again it is my pleasure to present a report to the Annual General Meeting of the Society, which this year takes place on Thursday April 6th at 7.30 in the Town Hall. I hope that it will go some way to making up for the lack of more regular newsletters. This has exercised the committee over the year, and we have plans to overcome the present difficulties of which this combined news and annual report is the first step.

The highlight of the last year has been the restoration of an award to mark good architecture and conservation in Islington. After a gap of four years, a new award generously sponsored by the Business Design Centre has been introduced. Like the Geoffrey Gribble Award, the new award has a life-span of ten years. We have had ten plaques made so it is incumbent upon us to fulfill that commitment. We hope that local architects and developers will feel equally compelled to design and build schemes worthy of the award and of Islington.

We have contributed to the big planning debates, notably Packington with the A.G.M. and King's Cross with another visit to Regeneration House. We have also been involved in correspondence with and support for local groups at Archway, St. Mary Magdalene School and the former Post Office site behind Upper Street.

As always, I am indebted to members of the committee. Stan Westwood has undertaken the thankless task of minutes secretary, and Frances Balfour the other duties of Secretary. Donald Mitchell has continued to look after our finances which are healthier than I have known. Harley Sherlock continues to host a monthly meeting at the Marquess Tavern and to provide sound advice both to us and as our representative at the London Forum. Mary Cosh, whose *History of Islington* was published in the course of the year, has continued to battle against considerable pain to attend and contribute to our meetings. Alan

Turner almost single-handed made the Architecture & Conservation Award a reality.

**Members are requested to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Society, on Tuesday, April 6th 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. 12th April 2004.**
- 3. To receive the Annual report 2005/6.**
- 4. To adopt the financial report to 31st December, 2005.**
- 5. To agree the levels of subscription.**
- 6. To elect the President and officers of the Society.**

(A full list will be provided at the meeting, but I am delighted to report that Lord Smith of Finsbury, better known as Chris, has accepted our invitation to serve as President.)

- 7. To consider any other relevant business.**

This will be followed by an address from the President.

### *The year in more detail*

Harry Brack recalled the battle over the building of the Packington Estate in place of repairable street properties at the A.G.M. It is pleasing to see that all the schemes offered for "new Packington" involve something of a return to the *status quo ante*. This was particularly apposite for us because the plans to demolish Union Square were the catalyst for our formation.

Our one-way trip to Hertford was greatly enjoyed by all who came. We were royally treated by the Hertford Society who are

justifiably proud of having staved off the excesses of 1970s brutalism experienced in other Hertfordshire towns. We enjoyed a wonderful run in Steve Wood's routemaster RM1699 including an unexpected lift to Hertford North station after we discovered engineering works had stopped services to Hertford East in the centre of the town.

In May Graham Loveland spoke on "Towers of Babel: or a response to the Government's agenda for a 'compact city'?" This was an entertaining as well as informative evening, for both members and the Council in responding to the Mayor's sometimes misrepresented tall buildings policy. As Islington's only planning supremo (the title can no longer be given to councillors as they can only be "supremo" for an area comprising a quarter of the Borough) Graham is uniquely placed to influence these matters.

The Bill Manley Memorial pub crawl again broke new ground as we crossed the Borough boundary into Camden, to start at a favourite of Bill's. Ten days earlier, the panel assessing candidates for the Architecture & Conservation Award met and visited all six short-listed sites. They were unanimous in choosing the City & Islington College building at the Finsbury Park end of Blackstock Road (better known to most of us as the Jack Ashley site) which is an excellent example of an existing building being substantially modified to meet a modern use. The College was keen to hold the award ceremony at a time of day and of year which would maximise presence at the building of its current students. We therefore set the date for unveiling the plaque in October, when Jeremy Corbyn in whose constituency the building lies was able to perform the ceremony despite a succession of key votes in the House of Commons. Jeremy has been upholding the principles for which the Labour party was founded against a reactionary right wing government for as long as I can remember, yet he manages to combine his duties as our representative in Parliament with attendance at a wide range of events here in Islington.

Our second church crawl also took us to the north of Islington, on July 6th and we

are again grateful to Bob O'Dell for his knowledge of where to find the venues and his time in organising the whole visit.

We returned to the King's Cross Railway Lands on November 10th where Roger Madelin gave us a tour of the revised proposals from Argent for the development of this 60 acre site. Members broadly welcomed the changes although there is still some disquiet about the road lay-out, the loss of Culross and much of Stanley Buildings, and mixed views about the gasholders. The proposed use of the gasholders, filled with housing, causes the most controversy. A minority see no point in saving them; their supporters would prefer to be able to look through them. However, the scheme for a new concourse to King's Cross, incorporating the Great Northern Hotel as part of the Argent development, was warmly welcomed.

The scheme for the concourse, and phase II of the London Underground work at King's Cross, was only funded at the last possible minute by the Treasury after it became clear that the Olympic bid was utterly dependent upon it. Argent had quite rightly made it clear they would not play ball without the northern ticket hall, which was a given when they and others bid for the rights to develop the railway lands. Moreover, it is a requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act that at any station where redevelopment work is carried out the station must be made fully accessible. Phase I had commenced after this law took effect, therefore King's Cross had to be made fully accessible and the only scheme to achieve this was phase II. There is a curious correlation between enthusiasm for the DDA and government expenditure, and it is inverse.

Our last event of 2005 was a talk by John Stewart of HACAN Clearskies. John has to explain the history of how two groups merged to arrive at this name: the HACAN is Heathrow Airport Campaign Against Noise. John told us that the biggest growth in membership in the past eighteen months had come from north Islington, and this is because changes in flight paths has resulted in more traffic over Finsbury Park. He also explained

a lacuna in the definition of night time flights whereby one hour falls outside of the definition and further leeway is allowed because landing time does not include stacking time.

Despite this and the attraction of cheap flights for the nouveau riche (which those who seek to represent us may become once in power), John was not entirely pessimistic about the future. The hideous subsidies to air travel are not sustainable (in every sense) and there is little justification for internal flights, usually to and from airports far from the origin and destination. Anyone interested in joining HACAN Clearskies should contact them at P.O. Box 339, Richmond, Surrey, telephone and facsimile 0208 876 0455, or via the internet, [www.hacan.org.uk](http://www.hacan.org.uk).

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.

### ***Packington Square***

After the enthusiastic presentation Harry Brack gave at the A.G.M., it is pleasing to report that in November the public was invited to an exhibition of the three short-listed schemes all conforming broadly to a return to the old street pattern. The Hyde scheme was far better developed. Its main drawback is the high building right up against the canal. Its main attraction is that, alone of the schemes, it offers the chance of a single move for every existing Packington Resident.

The Circle scheme presentation lacked attention to detail. As well as the last minute alteration of numbers, there was an element of double counting in the number of dwellings which they acknowledged. Their claim that everyone would have only one move was contradicted by the details of demolition and completion dates. One of the residential buildings was ten storeys high. On the other hand, this was the best scheme in terms of respecting the canal.

The proposed canal basin with the Southern Housing scheme seemed more

convincing than the rill proposed by Circle 33. However, the community centre was less satisfactory in this scheme than the other two. All of them had concentrated on the housing and needed more work on the commercial and retail bits. All had at least one eight storey or higher building. All had three storey street properties facing the existing street properties. Given their lower ceiling heights, these could all be raised to four storeys, thereby funding a reduction in the height of the taller buildings. Most people welcomed the subsequent decision to choose the Hyde scheme.

### ***King's Cross***

Members response to Roger Madelin's presentation was outlined earlier. Since our meeting, the King's Cross Conservation Area Advisory Committee has prepared a detailed defence of all listed buildings, outlining how it believes they can be integrated into a successful development. The King's Cross Railway Lands Group has underlined concerns about the road lay-out and potential impact on Copenhagen Street, and the need for some residential use in the southern part of the site.

The first full planning applications are being considered at a two day meeting of Camden's planning committee on March 8th & 9th. Disappointingly, it seems that most of the intermediate housing (designed to be affordable to people who would aspire to buy but are excluded by London house prices) will revert in time to market housing. Apart from denying the mayor's objectives, this would undermine the long term need for a primary school, which is part of the proposals.

### ***Archway development***

If the proposals for Packington reflect local opinion, the same cannot be said for the Archway. Despite overwhelming support for a modest development, consistent with the Borough's UDP, the Council seems wedded to a major development to fund the improvements to the road lay-out and tube station access. Apart from wishing to support our locally based members, the Society has to have regard to the Borough wide impact.

The Borough UDP used to support three Town Centres, but this was changed to

two in recognition of the fact that only one in the north could be sustained. We accepted this change, and are now concerned that an Archway in competition with the Nag's Head could result in neither being able to attract sufficient volume to thrive.

A similar argument applies to the proposed **Post Office site** behind Upper Street. As local shopping faces continued pressure, it is important that the Town Centre is focused on the Angel with linear shopping streets fanning away from the centre. The centre is rather undermined by the underuse of the main shop frontage that forms offices for the Royal Bank of Scotland. The expansion of Tesco has pulled the centre of gravity northwards, and now the centre is to be interrupted by a residential development where for decades there has been a world famous antique market and more recently a prominent Farmers' market. Creating a new retail area off the main street and further north seems to further undermine a cohesive centre. It also undermines the Council's own ideas for developing the centre, either to the north-east of the N1 Centre or on the east side of the main thoroughfare (should the offices be vacated).

### *Arsenal stadium*

The new stadium at Ashburton Grove has continued to take shape in time for the planned opening. True to past form, the Football Club have returned to the Council a number of times seeking changes to the permission granted in 2002. We feel the Society's position of not opposing the plans in principle but seeking greater control over the detail has been vindicated by events. Local residents will be relieved at the latest reports that the Council is resisting plans to continue using Drayton Park as an extended coach park on match days. An end to the unsatisfactory nature of the present arrangements - for fans as well as residents - was one of the positive aspects of the original plans.

### *Farewell to the routemaster*

Islington lost our last two pleasurable bus routes in the course of the year. The 38 was the last north London route and provoked a remarkable response from regular users and

Islington residents. A phenomenon not associated with the last tram, trolleybus, or RT was the sight of ordinary people on every street corner taking their own photographs. This was thanks to the growing ownership of mobile telephones with inbuilt cameras.

An overwhelming majority of those to whom I speak (not at dinner parties or the wheel of a Saab motor-car) hold the view that this has been a ghastly moronic error, and that the articulated bus with three uncontrolled entrances is a charter for those who like their travel free at the point of use. Transport for London's access advisor recently said that the bus had become the first choice of travel, having been inaccessible five years previously. I have to say that the reverse is true for me. The big attraction of the one-day ticket was the saving of five minutes here and there by a short hop along Balls Pond Road (rendered impossible by traffic queues around the alighting stop) or up the Pentonville Road (ruled out by the removal of the boarding stop). When under the weather recently, the prospect of a journey either standing in an airless box or sitting on an un-upholstered seat in the same box meant I stayed at home.

It could be considered that those of us who have been more or less able bodied have thus learned what it was like for wheelchair users and others who need step free access. However, London is big enough to cater for all its diverse people. It is somewhat ironic that, even after the last 159 had run, low floor buses remained absent from route 4, which is the only route to traverse the length of Tufnell Park Road. It has subsequently gained low-floor vehicles with the use of buses borrowed from First Bus. There is little or no sign that these buses are on loan to Metroline and First seems to have taken a considerable risk to its reputation.

The issue of free travel will be with us for some time to come. Free travel for under 18s has given rise to mixed views. It is good to get young people into the habit of using public transport, but not to the idea of not paying, nor to the exclusion of other intending passengers. It is possible to over-estimate the level of fare evasion. People with paper

tickets (still a requirement if you use Network Rail services), season tickets on Oyster, or who have reached their daily cap, have no need to pay and gaining a seat, if there is one, is a more pressing priority. Data available to TfL, though, may not support the degree of accuracy claimed for it.

### ***Stalwarts of the Society***

We bade farewell to a couple of stalwart members in the course of the year. Folly Sherlock divided her time between many causes, notably the Tower Theatre, but she was a strong supporter of the routemaster as a civilised means of transport and of the annual event to commemorate that theatre's favourite son, not to mention the real ale that went with it. At least we were able to travel in style to her funeral, held in the last week of the 38 bus service.

Gordon Wigglesworth was one of the many architects who have played a prominent part in the work of the Society. His chairmanship of the Planning Transport & Conservation Committee was much respected, and his thoughtful articles in our newsletter awaited with eagerness. A tribute appeared in the *Guardian*, written by our vice-chair Alan Turner. The *Islington Tribune* published a tribute to Folly; a bench in Canonbury Square in her memory has been provided by the Canonbury Society.

### ***Future of the Society***

As has been clear from the sporadic nature of our communications, we have continued to struggle with the demands on a voluntary group with limited volunteers whose time remains at a premium. The Committee has decided that greater effort must go into regularity of communication, even if this is at the expense of quality. For the last couple of years, our lack of direct communication was compensated in part by the space given to me in the *Highbury & Islington Express*. Sadly, the *High & I* never approached the readership levels of its well established sister the *Ham & High* ceased to appear last summer.

We move into an exciting new era with

Chris Smith's agreement to serve as our next President. I thought it important to let members know first. The rather low key announcement at the start of this report, and this section buried within it, is intended as a reward to those members who assiduously read what we produce from cover to cover. The rest of you may pick it up from newspaper coverage nearer the time.

The Committee has agreed that Harley Sherlock be nominated a life vice-President. I am sure this decision will carry universal acclaim. Harley has been a member from the start of the Society and served us in many ways, as past President, Chairman and for eighteen years our representative on the Borough Planning committee. It would be impossible to summarise all he has done, but fortunately it would also be superfluous. A book detailing Harley's work and the events of local importance surrounding it will be appearing later this year.

A couple of years ago I was rightly taken to task for failing to include in my report the award of an honorary degree to Harley by one of the local Universities he and I think of as North London but formally rejoicing in the geographically imprecise "Metropolitan". This award, following nomination by Islington Council, came at a marvellous investiture at the Barbican. Harley negotiated for his fellow graduands' speaking time, and was then prevailed upon to take additional guests' places at the lunch that followed. If I can master the technology, a photograph recording that happy occasion will appear elsewhere, serving also as a happy reminder of Folly.

### ***Annual Accounts***

Draft annual accounts appear on the back of this report. The last newsletter costs unexpectedly fell outside the year under review and the year's surplus has already been spent with the arrival of this annual report issue.

**I hope you will be able to come to the A.G.M. and other forthcoming events.**

**Andrew Bosi**

## INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT for the YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2005

		2005		2004
	£		£	
Subscriptions Donations & Events	3,927		4,050	
of which Annual dinner £1100 (2004:£1286)				
Miscellaneous income (VAT)	99		290	
Interest receivable	22		56	
Awards	2,004			
		6,052		4,396
Printing & distribution costs	480		717	
Meeting expenses	2,142		1,766	
of which Annual dinner £1188 (2004: £1374)				
Miscellaneous expenses (VAT)	85		118	
Donations to other groups	117		115	
Awards	2,219			
Adjustments (note 1)	651			
		<u>5,694</u>		<u>2,716</u>
(Deficit)/Surplus		358		1,680

### BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2005

Cash at bank	6,725		4,601	
Add: received in arrears	0		101	
		6,725		4,702
<u>Accumulated funds</u>				
Balance brought forward	6,367		4,702	
Adjustment to prior year accounts			-15	
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	358		1,680	
<b>Total (note 2)</b>		<u>6,725</u>		<u>6,367</u>

**(Signed) Donald Mitchell, Hon. Treasurer**

#### Notes.

1. Expenditure in 2005 relevant to 2004
2. Split between current and Instant access business accounts

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