
THE ISLINGTON SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2007/8

After a fourteen month year last time, we have decided to take advantage of the constitutional requirement for an A.G.M. any time in the calendar year to delay the meeting until we have a good speaker whom we hope will attract a large attendance.

The Committee has arranged a number of events and I hope that this advance notice will enable busy members to commit some of them to your diaries. As well as the A.G.M. on October 8th, we are visiting the St. Mary Magdalene Academy in November. More immediately, our traditional pub crawl and church crawl take place on Friday June 20th and Tuesday July 15th. The usual "Meet the Officers" events continue at the Marquess on the first Tuesday of each month: July 1st, August 5th, etc.

Once again, thanks are due to the committee in particular for the events. Stan Westwood as Secretary, Donald Mitchell as Treasurer have the least public roles. Alan Turner has again masterminded the Architecture and Conservation Award in 2007, but has relinquished the reins to David Gibson for one year only in 2008. Bob O'Dell has continued to organise the Church crawl and keep our membership records in good order prior to handing this job to Jenni Chan, who like Denis Alderman joined the committee in the course of the year. Frank Hopkins has (with Donald Mitchell) organised 2 successful dinners since the last report was written, and is also organising the November event.

Members are requested to attend the 48th Annual General Meeting of the Society, on Thursday, October 8th 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. 14th June 2007.**
- 3. To receive the Annual report 2007/8.**

- 4. To adopt the financial report to 31st December, 2007.**

- 5. To agree the levels of subscription.**

- 6. To elect the officers of the Society & Committee.**

(A full list will be provided at the meeting.)

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

This will be followed by a talk by **John Armitt** on "Islington and the 2012 Olympics". The committee felt that there would be a good deal of interest in the impact the Olympics will have in Islington which is adjacent to one of the main site boroughs as well as hosting events at the Sobell Centre. John Armitt is well known to some of us. He addressed a packed meeting in Islington Town Hall days after taking charge at Union Railways, as it was then known, to oversee the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. He gave us the welcome news then that plans to run it along the North London Railway line had been dropped. It is hard to imagine CTRL trains competing with the London Overground to-day as it moves to a "turn-up-and-go" frequency. (Turn-up-and-go means you arrive at the station confident a train will do so, rather than looking up the timetable, or worse, not bothering with the timetable either but setting off more in hope than expectation.) Indeed, the London Overground is central to Islington's participation in the Olympics -as spectators, I should add.

I do hope members can commit this date to their diary and will come to hear John speak.

The year in more detail

The first event of the year was our A.G.M. in June. Our newer M.P. Emily Thornberry spoke to us after the formal part of the meeting about the chronic shortage of affordable housing in Islington. This includes not only social housing to rent, which historically usually meant Council housing but increasingly means renting from a Housing Association, but also homes for first time

buyers. Those whose jobs command a salary sufficient to obtain a mortgage anywhere outside central and inner London find house purchase in Islington impossible. Emily referred to our role as the cement in society. Without people between the two extremes of poverty (the sixth most deprived Borough) and wealth (the million plus pound houses), some services like local shops become non-viable and others, like schools, are distorted by an imbalanced intake which runs counter to the comprehensive ideal.

The June date of the A.G.M. meant that it was swiftly followed by three of our annual events. The Bill Manley Memorial Pub Crawl eight days later was held entirely in the St. Peter's Ward where we again found a couple of pubs not visited previously in the fifteen years that this event has been held.

In July the fifth annual church crawl took us from St. Joan of Arc in Highbury to the former St. Paul's which gave its name to St. Paul's Road. Wisely Bob O'Dell had arranged the crawl, with two intermediate stops, so that the gentle slope between venues took us marginally closer to sea level.

The following day we held our Annual Dinner at The Albion in Thornhill Road. As we had held our monthly meet the officers session at The Marquess on the previous Tuesday, we actually had three events in as many days, drawing comparison with London Bus services. I am afraid we are more likely to imitate them in terms of more one-person operation than in an increase in frequency. As last year's summer weather came in April, it was quite a smart move to hold our formal meal when the inclement weather set in, but attendance was down on the previous year and the committee felt with hindsight that we had been too close to the traditional time for holidays. The event was enjoyed by those who came and thanks are due to Donald Mitchell and Frank Hopkins for both their assiduous search for a suitable venue before the event and its organisation. The Committee was pleased to re-engage them and they have again enjoyed sampling what Islington has to offer, at their own expense, prior to this year's event.

Our team of conservation and design

experts also met in the summer to review another healthy shortlist of candidates for the Architecture & Conservation Award. The competition was much closer this year as I hope Alec Forshaw's report in the last issue of *Islington News* conveyed. The panel made its choice on July 16th and the award was presented on November 20th. The organisation of this event, both in terms of reaching the decision and then arranging to present the award, occupies a considerable amount of time and Alan Turner has our thanks for all he has done. This year seemed to involve more chasing letters phone calls and e-mails than ever but this is not the reason that Alan is unable to run the Award in 2008. David Gibson has kindly agreed to make a one year come-back: Alan hopes to be able to resume the duties in 2009.

Our final event of 2007 was the Christmas Party held to mark Alec Forshaw's retirement as Conservation Officer. Alec's speech to us was reported in *Islington News*. The event was held at The Lord Clyde, which has recently received a much needed makeover and is a venue which has never yet featured on our annual pub crawl. I am sorry that we were gazumped from using the former Finsbury Town Hall but I hope that the food and drink at The Lord Clyde made up for this. The present owners of Finsbury Town Hall have an expensive building to maintain and obtained a block booking for the building, whereas we were seeking only to hire one room.

The annual dinner at the start of April proved to be exceptionally good value for money in a new restaurant in Halliford Street, part of a Council development that transformed an unsightly site of derelict garages into mainly mews houses. A fuller report appears in the Summer Newsletter.

We have this year concentrated on ensuring that a newsletter arrives every four months, at the expense of holding fewer events. For various reasons, events are less well supported than in the past. We do not have the resources to hold regular meetings on a fixed day of the month, as the Archaeology & History Society does, and there is no point in competing with their excellent and varied

programme. Nor should we compete with the local groups whose meetings are having a positive effect on developments at places like Archway and Highbury Corner. We do maintain contact with these groups, many are corporate members of this Society.

Architecture & Conservation Award

The second winner of the Award was a new building, the Children's Ward of Moorfields Eye Hospital. It replaced a block of flats which latterly had been in the ownership of the Hospital for use by nurses. Peerless Street flats, as they had been known, became Fryer House in appreciation of the work of Reg Fryer, a Westminster councillor who for many years was an assiduous governor of the hospital until his untimely death in an accident on holiday in Greece.

The merits of the new building were reported in the Spring 2008 newsletter.

Protecting local shops

Many of the policy issues that confront us are familiar from one year to the next. The future of local shops includes the future of local Post Offices. As well as being a local shop itself, the presence of a Post Office is important to the viability of shops in the same parade and particularly where there are no banks or free cash dispensing machines. We have therefore opposed closures in the strongest possible terms, although one has to wonder at the point of the consultation exercise when the reply simply regurgitates the arguments put forward for closure and fails to address the specific points made in objection. When the Post Offices in Southgate Road, St. Paul's Road and Westbourne Road were closed we were told that the Post Office would not lose custom because people would simply go to the next nearest outlet. Yet now we are told that has not happened and the Post Office is losing money. Their solution is to close the Post Office that was the next nearest outlet and move us on still further. Happily our two M.P.s have been more successful in wringing some concession out of the Post Office.

It is as well for the Labour Party that our M.P.s are as industrious as they are, because the government has hardly covered itself in glory over the issue. If their approach

is indistinguishable from that one might expect from the Conservative Party the choice at election times is taken away and the result is fewer people voting. Indeed, a Conservative Council in Essex has shown more inclination to meet this social need and support Post Offices from its tax payers resources than our own Council.

The Council's attitude to the ownership of shop freeholds remains extremely disappointing. When Liberal seats were lost in 2006, the new leader promised a Listening Council and there has been some evidence of change and of not just listening but hearing. It is therefore the more surprising that their minds are closed on this issue. I could understand if there were a short-term need for capital or a once in a lifetime project to fund, that the Council might dispose of assets. To say that the Council has no role in owning shops flies in the face of the trends of the last twenty-five years, which is for Councils to do less in terms of direct provision and more in terms of facilitating others. How better to facilitate a vibrant community than by supporting essential shops and services in premises which market forces would convert into other uses. How much more stable would be Council budgets with a steady rental income than with one off capital receipts?

The problem with this last point, for which all political parties must share blame, is the mantra "time for change", the idea that political groups cannot refresh themselves. The idea takes root that a governing group has only a finite life-span and this drives it to short-term expedients.

Islington Secondary Schools

Those who came to hear James Kempton speak to the Society may recall that I questioned him about the over-provision of secondary school places. In reply he pointed out that the large increase in places was for one year only as the new Academy replacing Islington Green would be 4-form entry rather than six.

It remains the case that we now have ten secondary schools even though there are insufficient applications to fill nine of them. The situation is complicated because the location of schools and roads on which buses

travel is such that it is often more convenient for pupils to cross a Borough boundary to the most accessible school. Parents in south Camden have launched a vociferous campaign for a new school even though no account of provision in neighbouring Boroughs appears to be being taken. Hackney has also had a major structural reorganisation of its secondary provision.

At a time when a substantial rebuilding programme of existing schools is under way, matters are further complicated by changes in what curiously is still called Sixth Form provision. (The "fifth form" is now year 11.) The government intends that there should be some form of training for everyone up to the age of 18. Staying on rates post-16 are much better than they were when several schools ended their sixth form provision and the Sixth Form College was established. An undated and unsigned report circulating around school governing bodies suggests that a return to sixth forms is not the answer but neglects to address the fact that this is exactly what the two Academies will be doing.

It has been fashionable to knock Islington schools for many years, another manifestation of the time for change agenda referred to above. It is certainly true that Margaret Hodge presided over a disastrous appointment as education director, and that the imposition of a private company to act for the education authority has blurred the lines of accountability. Whenever a DfES edict refers to the local authority, one has to ask whether it means Cambridge Education Associates or the London Borough of Islington. However, as the "fan club for Islington" I feel we should be proclaiming the good things that are happening despite these adversities.

In particular, the Sixth Form College, now City & Islington, has been a massive success, achieving results that are ahead of the country as a whole. This is despite the level of deprivation which many of our children endure. We should never write off the chances of children from poor backgrounds, but nor should we ignore the disadvantages of living in cramped accommodation with nowhere for private study, or an absence of (space for)

stacked bookcases. Being surrounded by books sends a strong message about their value and importance.

Our secondary schools have achieved well when measured in terms of value added, and have had some outstanding Ofsted reports. If you go into schools there is a sense of purpose which was not evident twenty years ago when "comprehensive" was a euphemism for "secondary modern". Ofsted has highlighted the cramped conditions of some schools and the poor standard of buildings, but this is now being addressed in the comprehensive Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

The surplus of places in excess of pupils has been partially addressed by reducing the number offered, but this has drawn protests from one of the schools affected. Islington has always offered a good choice of single sex, co-educational, large and small schools. A school with six forms of entry is optimally placed to offer subject choices in the GCSE years (Key stage 4) - as all mathematicians know, six is a perfect number. A four-form entry school has the advantage of being less of a culture shock to year 7 pupils coming from a relatively smaller primary school. This is why the head and governors of the Islington Arts & Media school are upset at being reduced to five forms of entry.

The problem of surplus places, and the impact on the neighbouring park and houses which I reported last year, should not obscure the opportunities the St. Mary Magdalene Academy offers those fortunate enough to learn there. Frank Hopkins has kindly arranged a visit for us later in the year so that members can judge for themselves. I hope this will be well supported, and if so, that it can be followed by visits to BSF schools once completed.

For all the leadership deficit at the administrative centre, schools have profited from a remarkable level of sweat equity from parent, staff and community governors over the years. And after the first director made an art form of finding a different question to answer than the one asked, it was always a pleasure to question Kirit Modi on proposals for school

reorganisation because the answers unfailingly addressed the questions. When the Council went wrong, one suspected it had chosen to reject his advice. Kirit has just retired and will be a hard act to follow.

School buildings and open spaces

One of the criticisms of the St. Mary Magdalene Academy plans centres on the resultant loss of open space which previously was open to the public. Councils of all political persuasions are adept at producing figures that support the idea that more open space is being provided. The trouble is that open space restricted to school pupils, or closed altogether (such as Highbury roundabout) is very different from space in which you can walk from A to B or exercise your dog. Space which is or feels unsafe through neglect is not better replaced by space that is no longer accessible. It needs to be cared for and returned to safe use.

As well as the Academy, there are two similar instances of loss of public space. One is Ashmount Primary school, a 1950s glass building designed by Cadbury-Smith for two schools, infants and juniors. The two have since merged and this has required adaptation of the building but this has been the case across the Borough in schools such as Canonbury Road, Rotherfield Street and Newington Green. It is hardly surprising that the governors would prefer a new building, but even so it is disappointing to see repeated assertions that there will be no loss of open space when manifestly this is untrue. James Dunnett has fought a valiant battle on our behalf to save the present building, which has architectural merit and is unique in a Borough dominated by late Victorian and Edwardian LCC school buildings, and the continued public access to public land.

The other site is smaller, but similar principles apply. A quarter-of-an-acre playground with six plane trees in Seward Street, E.C.1, given in 1891 by the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association (MPGA), fell into disuse when the street became industrial. However, the nearby Dallington private primary school in Dallington Street leased it 22 years ago. Leo

Chapman found that the lease ended in 2006 and drew attention to this loss of public facility. The MPGA is trying to get Islington Council to reopen it to the public. There are 600 people now living on the street.

The issue of bequests is also something which perhaps Amenity Societies should review. Many people might wish to leave money to public benefaction but may be dissuaded by the inability of posterity to ensure that their wishes are met. Many of the old hospitals owed their existence to individual philanthropy. When the NHS took over everyone thought this guaranteed their future, but as we now know this was far from the case. Of course health needs change and the facilities we need for health care with them, but we seem to have lost sight of the fact that the assets being sold off are only assets in the public domain as a result of the generosity of the donor.

King's Cross

The problem of East-West access at King's Cross Station remains unresolved. More recently the campaign has taken a sentimental turn, with people lamenting the loss of the clock on the bridge which featured in films of the past and was synonymous with tearful departures.

The Railway Lands development moves slowly. Argent won their battle to demolish part of the listed Stanley Buildings despite the care which parliament had taken to ensure that demolition was confined to the one building in the path of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

The Link itself opened more or less on time. It had slipped only six months since the John Prescott rescue package agreed in 1998. There were three opening ceremonies in November. Security arrangements isolated people from an essential facility given the cold and the length of proceedings, with the result that refreshments were curtailed at the final event. Otherwise, it was a marvellous advertisement for the most sustainable means of travel and in stark contrast to the launch of Heathrow Terminal 5 a few months later.

As we go to press the outcome of a planning appeal on the triangle site is awaited.

This site is the part of the railway lands east of York Way which logically is part of Islington. Because York Way was realigned to accommodate the CTRL, and the boundary has not been reviewed, part of the site is in Camden. Approval was therefore needed by both Boroughs and Argent sought this before the 2006 elections. Both ruling groups were well disposed to the scheme, despite local opposition. Local councillors commendably spoke out against their leadership in both Boroughs and the issue was unresolved before the elections. Voters expressed their displeasure with both Labour leadership in Camden and Liberal in Islington, including in the latter case the councillors who had stood up to an unacceptable degree of bullying.

The new councillors in both Boroughs were unhappy with the scheme, but Camden narrowly voted to support it with some amendments which seemed to run counter to the objection made on grounds of lack of affordable housing. Officers argued that they were bound by their predecessors' vote, which called into question why they were being asked to vote again. Islington however did not support the application, so that Camden's formal position was of non-determination. The Mayor of London declined to enforce his affordable housing policy by calling in the application.

Transport issues

The change of Mayor may result in some significant changes next year, but in the year just gone the main event has been the acquisition of what is now London Overground by Transport for London. In Islington, this includes the North London line and the Barking-Gospel Oak line serving Upper Holloway and Crouch Hill.

The immediate impact was on fares. By accepting pay-as-you-go Oyster, journeys via Stratford or Barking or Blackhorse Road became significantly cheaper and a return journey now costs less than using the bus. The downside of this is that overcrowding, already a serious issue, has become even worse. The problem of competing demand for use of the lines, and an infrastructure starved of investment, meant that there would not be

massive improvements in the service although the irritating gap in the evening service from Barking has been plugged.

One of the reasons for the success of the Congestion Charge scheme was that it was preceded by improvements to buses which were evident once congestion charging began. Understandably, the Mayor did not trumpet the improvements to London Overground before they become evident to users, but in reiterating his record in improving buses he may have given fuel to the argument that he had run his term and it was time for change. Moreover, the improvement to buses has been clouded by the loss of bus conductors and over-use of articulated buses on the busiest routes.

However, that too was old news by 2007. Some smaller scale measures meant the bus service in 2008 is better than it was last year. The extension of the 21 to Newington Green, restoring a link to south London, was so successful there were further increases in frequency and the route is reliable even at the extremity of its route here in Islington.

Another link foolishly cut in the 1980s was restored in November, when the 59 was extended to King's Cross. It was absurd that TfL was and is promoting a tram link from Waterloo to King's Cross when there was no direct bus route. The change was brought about to meet the perceived needs of International travellers for whom St. Pancras has replaced Waterloo. Unfortunately, stopping arrangements for south bound buses are so poor that any advantage the bus might hold over the tube for people with heavy luggage is negated by the long journey across Euston Road to the nearest stop. On the other hand, the new stopping arrangements for buses 45 and 63 are a great improvement. TfL did consider diverting the 63 to serve Waterloo but wisely rejected it because of the adverse impact on people travelling further. However, if it is not possible to bring the 59 nearer to St. Pancras a route to Waterloo via King's Cross Road may be necessary, particularly if Argent is successful in bringing more people to the area by bus.

A brand new route began in May, linking Old Street to the Docklands area. This

route is the third to use the number 135 in the last thirty years.

There have also been frequency improvements on the 56 which runs from Barts to Whipps Cross. The night service N106 from Finsbury Park has been withdrawn as usage was low. The 205 was extended to Mile End although for some obscure reason it actually terminates one stop short of the interchange.

On the Tube, the collapse of Metronet has not stopped all of the planned engineering work. Businesses in Upper Street are understandably miffed by the early closure of the Victoria line on Mondays to Thursdays. Their mood was not helped when an amnesty was granted on Association Football match days. Obviously, chaos would ensue if large numbers in the area were unable to leave by tube, but as usual the needs of small business are either overlooked or considered to be unimportant. The work to the gas main in St. Paul's Road will add further to their woes.

The Northern line reverted to its fixed pattern of service. Outside the peaks Morden is not served by Charing Cross branch trains. Every few years someone seems to have second thoughts about the best way to run the Northern line. Each time the pattern of service is changed, it is promoted as an improvement to passengers. Either it is creating more through journeys without change or it is facilitating a more reliable or frequent service.

Libraries & Islington Museum

The new history library is now operational at Finsbury Library. There have been a couple of low key events to mark its opening which is gradual in nature.

One casualty of the various changes and cuts in expenditure over the years has been the press cuttings service. If you research any subject the reference library offers an excellent service in press cuttings from the 1950s and 60s but more recently cuttings have not been kept. Almost single handedly, our own Mary Cosh is replacing the service Islington libraries

used to provide.

Other Planning issues

The publication of a draft Heritage Protection Bill may occupy us in the coming year. A full report including observations from our President Chris Smith is included in the Summer 2008 newsletter.

Work has commenced on the Packington site and the first of the BSF funded secondary schools.

The departure of Ford from their site just behind Highbury Corner has not provoked any grief amongst environmentalists, but the plans for building to seven storeys has and I recently signed a joint letter outlining our concerns. The Upper Street Association, Archaeology & History Society and the Canonbury Society were the other parties to this letter.

Progress on improving Highbury Corner itself has stalled. The Mayoral election imposed a period of purdah and the change of Mayor has led to further delay. The Mayor needs to read the papers even though it is probably the one transport issue in front of him on which he should have more first hand knowledge than his predecessor.

The one-way gyratory celebrates its 50th anniversary in October and I was hoping that we might celebrate properly with its demise.

Newington Green Celebrates

The Newington Green Action Group is celebrating the 350th birthday of the grade I terrace on the western arm of the green. They are publishing "The Village that Changed the World" at £5.99 plus £1 postage and packing.

Annual Accounts

As always, draft annual accounts appear on the back of this report.

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, 2007

		2007	2006
	£	£	£
Subscriptions Donations & Events	3,968	3,927	
of which Annual dinner £594 (2006:£ 952)			
Interest receivable	434	244	
		3,926	4,212
Printing & distribution costs	1,086	1,066	
Meeting expenses	1,058	1,478	
of which Annual dinner £937 (2006: £1091)			
Miscellaneous expenses (VAT)	114	55	
Donations to other groups	20	20	
Entertainment	475		
Refunds	30	--	
		<u>2,619</u>	<u>5,694</u>
(Deficit)/Surplus		1,143	1,593

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2007

Cash at bank	9,458	8,321	
Add: received in arrears	-	-	
		9,458	8,321
<u>Accumulated funds</u>			
Balance brought forward	8,321	6,725	
Adjustment to prior year accounts	(6)	3	
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	1,143	1,593	
Total		<u>9,458</u>	<u>8,321</u>

(Signed) Donald Mitchell, Hon. Treasurer

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