

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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## Proposed 'free school' in Highbury sparks concern



Ladbroke House, proposed location of the 'free school'

By CHARLIE ROBERSON

Plans to open a new free school in Ladbroke House have proved contentious among members of the Highbury community. The government recently purchased the site for £33 million and is currently deciding its future.

The Meller Educational Trust (MET), which runs several academies and university technical colleges (UTCs), are proposing to use the location for a new school with a focus on film specialism. The school could have capacity for as many as 1,000 students from the ages of 11 to 18. There would be no outdoor space at the school.

The Trust also plans to create new luxury flats on the site, using some of the revenue raised from the property to finance the school. More information about the MET can be found on their website, <http://www.mellereducationaltrust.org/>.

Among the concerns raised about the development are the impact of 1,000 pupils coming to Highbury from across London, the prospect of clashes with the existing Highbury Grove and Highbury Fields secondary schools, and the possibility that there could be better uses for the building, such as providing affordable housing for key workers. There is also worry among

***"A staggering waste of taxpayers' money."***

some locals that the school will not benefit local students and will not add anything significant to the Highbury community.

Ladbroke House is located on Highbury Grove near Highbury Fields, just opposite Christ Church. It was previously leased by London Metropolitan University but has now been vacant for some years.

Speaking to the Islington Gazette in July, Islington Council leader Richard

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Watts said the council only found about the proposed school when designs appeared on an architect firm's website. He described the plan as a "staggering waste of taxpayers' money."

As the Department for Education is not planning to consult the local community about this proposal, an independent consultation took place on December 5<sup>th</sup> to get local input on the plans and issues relating to them. Unfortunately this issue of the HCA newsletter went to print before the meeting.

Contact the consultation team at [ladbrokeHouseCC@gmail.com](mailto:ladbrokeHouseCC@gmail.com). We will report back on developments and will also provide further updates on the fate of Ladbroke House in future issues.

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**2017 AGM**  
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# Community considers proposed changes to Highbury Fields

By CHARLIE ROBERSON

Plans to redevelop the buildings in Highbury Fields have sparked lively debate. The proposal will see the park's café and Bandstand community building consolidated into one indoor space. Proponents say this will free up new green space in one of the most densely urban areas in the country.

However some are concerned that the change could disrupt current parts of the park and change the special character of Highbury Fields that so many are fond of. A large amount of funding will be required to see the plans carried out in full.

A particular sticking point will be the fate of the park's trees, some of which are currently in poor condition.



The issues were discussed in depth at the Highbury East Ward Partnership meeting on November 30th.

Given how beloved the Highbury Fields area is, all potential changes will no doubt be scrutinised closely by local residents.

## Thank you and festive greetings



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## Highbury Fields school rated outstanding by Ofsted

By CHARLIE ROBERSON

Highbury Fields School, our local girls secondary school, has been declared 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in their October inspection. This is the highest rank that a school can achieve and an improvement on its 2012 rating of 'Good'.

The Ofsted report notes that, "The headteacher and senior team have created a culture where staff and pupils are encouraged to excel." It goes on to praise the schools leaders for ensuring "that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding." The report can be accessed in full on the Highbury Fields School website.

The news follows a string of successful rounds of Highbury Fields students' exam results. In 2016, over a



third of all A level results (35%) were at A\* or A grade.

The HCA is thrilled by this news and would like to congratulate the school's staff and students for achieving such an excellent report. Special praise should be awarded to headteacher Gladys Berry (pictured below). Under her leadership the school has evidently thrived.



Photo: Courtesy of the Islington Gazette



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# 'Prawn on the Lawn' review

By CHRIS SCOTT

Thanks to a prize in the raffle at the HCA's AGM I had a voucher for two glasses of prosecco and six oysters at Prawn on the Lawn, which my partner and I used recently. Situated in St. Paul's Road at the bottom of Highbury Grove, it is a fish shop by day and a bar/restaurant by night. Although it was a busy Friday evening the staff were friendly, knowledgeable and helpful; nor did they mind that we were not actually going to be spending any money!

We sat upstairs in the bar area which has a down to earth feel and was not too noisy. The oysters were fresh and delicious as well as being beautifully presented. The prosecco was nice and dry. The main dining area is four tables downstairs where you can have a full menu and sit in more comfort. Highly recommended.

More information about can be found at their website (<http://prawnonthelawn.com/>). Booking in advance is advised - especially at weekends.



# Book now to enjoy Christmas lunch at the Ecology Centre café

By SARAH POTTER

The café at the Ecology Centre in Gillespie Park is to open this year for Christmas Lunch, so that up to 30 adults can for the first time enjoy a low key celebration there, with community atmosphere at a reasonable price.

Priti, who bakes the cakes and savouries at the Ecology Centre's Sunday café over the summer months, has designed a special menu with the traditional turkey and stuffing or lentil bake, beginning with a Swedish platter of ham, marinated salmon (gravadlax) and stuffed mushrooms. To finish, there is a Swedish-style rice pudding with tangerines and whipped cream.

Guests can arrive from 2 pm, with lunch served at 3 pm. They will be greeted with mulled cider or apple juice, and can bring their own drinks. Cranberry punch will also be available, as well as tea and coffee with pudding. Priti is hoping that a musician or two will join the occasion and provide entertainment.

The cost per head is £30, and bookings with payment can be made at [highburytime@live.co.uk](mailto:highburytime@live.co.uk) by Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December. Since she has been running the Sunday café at the Eco Centre, Priti has seen both the Centre and Gillespie Park become much better used. In 2017, she will be re-opening the café on the first Sunday in March, a month earlier than in previous years.

The **Highbury Community Association (HCA)** represents local residents and businesses on all aspects of living and working in Highbury, Lower Holloway and Finsbury Park.

**Membership is free.** Members receive bi-monthly newsletters like this one. New members will receive the newsletter by email (unless you don't have email). To join or talk to us about anything Highbury-related, visit our website, or email [hcanews@hotmail.com](mailto:hcanews@hotmail.com). The HCA can also be contacted on Facebook and Twitter.

The opinions expressed in Highbury Community News are not necessarily those of the HCA and/or its committee members.

**Please let us know if you move, so we can keep our membership list up to date.**

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# The home straight: end in sight for new Highbury Roundhouse building

By TONY MILLER, Secretary to the Highbury Roundhouse Association

When you watch the London Marathon and see the faces of those who cross the line, you can't help but be impressed. The look of agony soon passes; the joy is unsuppressed; most obvious is the satisfaction that all those days of preparation have paid off. Some will immediately start training for the next challenge. Others will sit back and heave a sigh of relief. Temperamentally, I confess I belong to the latter tendency.

In August 2010, the main building of Highbury Roundhouse was declared unsafe. Despite a vigorous campaign to persuade the council to repair the much-loved building, they opted to demolish it. The Roundhouse continued to operate from a number of different sites, still offering all its core services. But that couldn't go on for ever. So for six years, we have been beavering away to build a new community centre on the same site. It's been something of a marathon

We started with local fundraising: Dinner dances, quiz nights, raffles and auctions. The HCA named us as the chosen charity for their 2011 AGM. The ball started to roll. We engaged Sarah Wigglesworth Architects to design a beautiful new building which would fit snugly into the back part of the Ronalds Road site, looking out over Olden Gardens.

***"Our new building will rest on the support of the local community."***

We have a special debt of gratitude to Highbury West Councillors, Theresa Debono, Richard Greening and Andy Hull. Without their support and generous grant of \$106 funds to develop the project, we would not have been able to progress to the point where our building was given planning permission in 2013.

Then we had to find the funds to build it. Earlier this year, we negotiated a Conditional Development Agreement with the council which will give us a 99 year lease on the site, a pre-requisite of any funding application. The Big Lottery were interested and impressed by the work we do. They were encouraged when the council offered matched-funding, but it was a slow process.

In June we had to act quickly. We had to make an early start and put in the piled foundations for our new building, before our planning permission expired. The only way we could pay for that was with the money we had in the bank - money we had raised locally. So in a very real sense, our new building will rest on the support of the local community.

With the planning permission secured, in perpetuity, things started to fall into place. The Big Lottery confirmed that they would give us one of the biggest capital grants they have made. Other funders have come forward with contributions. The London Marathon gave us £130,000.

It's not over yet. We can build the building - but we still have to fundraise for the fixtures and fittings.

As you read this, our contractor should be putting portakabins in place, setting up the site to start construction after the Christmas break. When that happens I shall know we're on the home straight. We can't slacken the pace. There's still a few miles to go but we will get to the finishing line.

**Do you have a local news story you would like to see in a future edition of Highbury Community News?**  
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# Have you ever thought about becoming a Park Theatre volunteer?

Located near Finsbury Park station, Park Theatre is one of North London’s most adventurous and unique arts venues. Development Manager DORCAS MORGAN was kind enough to give us some insight into volunteering there

Linda Gaskell laughs when you ask about the plays she gets to see as a volunteer usher at North London’s Park Theatre: “I have the opportunity to see everything – including things I wouldn’t have chosen to see. And they’ve blown me away!”

Linda became an usher in 2014, a year after the theatre opened its doors, but her connection goes back much further.

“My partner, Sue, worked on this site, when it was a 60s office block housing the charity Sense. The first time we came, we tried to work out where her desk would’ve been.”

The two loved both the £2.6 million transformation of the building, and the fact that it was on their doorstep, just north of Finsbury Park Station. When Linda learned that the theatre had openings for volunteer ushers, she thought about her prior experience of working with volunteers.

“I know how important they are to charities, and I had some time and was up for doing something.” So she joined the nearly 80-strong group of Park Theatre ushers.

Artistic Director Jez Bond praises the work of Linda and her colleagues, and says “we’ve worked with volunteers from the outset, the theatre simply couldn’t run without them. It’s a wonderful union where those in the local community can engage with the theatre, generously providing their time and energy – and at the same time supporting the ambition of the theatre. They help us become beacons for the local area.”

“People look at this bright, multi-story building and see the stars that play here – Mark Gatiss just played in our sellout run of *The Boys in the Band* – and they think, wow. But they don’t realise that we get no government funding for our core activities.”

Naomi Dixon, the theatre’s Venue and Volunteer manager, explains that volunteers come from a wide range of ages and backgrounds. Some work one shift a month, others do as many as three a week, depending on what time they can give. “We could not be more grateful for the generosity of the local community who help us keep this small, but exciting theatre running.”

The theatre returns the favour by providing professional development opportunities like first aid and customer service training. Park Theatre ushers are ambassadors at the most personal level, creating a welcoming atmosphere not just for members of the public but for the visiting artists as well.

Linda Gaskell is living proof of that. “I love meeting the audiences. Sometimes they come from so far to see our shows. In the end, she reflects, being an usher in a “neighbourhood theatre with global ambition” is more than just an activity. “It’s a great thing to be part of – it makes you feel proud that you are making it happen.”

To find out more about volunteering at Park Theatre, please email [volunteers@parktheatre.co.uk](mailto:volunteers@parktheatre.co.uk).



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# Charles Dickens in Islington

By SARAH POTTER

When the orphaned runaway workhouse boy Oliver Twist reaches London in the company of the Artful Dodger, his arrival in the city takes place at the Angel, Islington. As Dickens writes, "As John Dawkins objected to their entering London before nightfall, it was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St John's road, struck down the small street which terminates at Sadler's Wells theatre, through Exmouth-street and Coppice-row... thence into Little Saffron-hill and so into Saffron-hill the Great..." (p. 70, 2012, Penguin edition).

Oliver thus finds himself in Clerkenwell in the slum where Fagin has his den on Field Lane, now the southern section of Saffron Hill, according to David Rosenberg's *Radical Footprints* (2015, p. 44). Later in the novel, Noah Claypole and his lady, the oppressors from whom Oliver had fled, arrive in London in the same way. Claypole then of course

encounters Fagin at a public house in the neighbourhood. Fagin sends him to listen covertly to Nancy, who reports Monks' designs on Oliver to his benefactors, thus inexorably setting in train Nancy's brutal murder by Bill Sikes. Thus for Dickens, the Angel in Islington was London's boundary, and a rapid crossing point into crime and squalor.

While it is clear that Dickens the novelist made significant use of Islington in the plot of *Oliver Twist*, more links between Dickens' life and Islington are becoming clearer from studies of his childhood and his adult career, including Claire Tomalin's recent biography of Dickens (2011), Michael Allen's book *Charles Dickens and the Blacking Factory* (2011) and Ruth Richardson's *Dickens and the Workhouse* (2012).

At the ages of 7 and 8, Dickens was taken to London from his home in Chatham to see the famous clown Grimaldi in Christmas pantomimes. Grimaldi lived in Exmouth Street in Islington, where his plaque can be seen today. He performed as a dancer at the age of three at Sadler's Wells theatre nearby, then a rural spot, and

was seen as a great comic throughout his life.

In late 1837, Dickens edited Grimaldi's memoirs for publication, just after finishing the *Pickwick Papers* and before starting on *Nicholas Nickleby*, and at a time when *Oliver Twist* had begun to come out in serial form (Tomalin, 2011, p. 93). Although Dickens was writing fiction with considerable success, his edited memoir of Grimaldi was a dull and anecdotal work, according to Grimaldi's biographer Richard Findlater (1978, pp.244-248). Dickens as editor failed to capture Grimaldi's role as a satirist of the social life of his day, his intellectualism, and the enormous sense of fun and good nature of his comedy (Findlater, 1978, p. 141, p. 164). Dickens undertook to edit the memoirs as part of his dealings with his publisher, according to Tomalin (2011, p. 93).

Just previously to editing Grimaldi's memoirs, Dickens was actually living briefly in Islington. In August and September 1836, he stayed at his father's lodgings in Edward Street, north of the City Road, according to Claire Tomalin (2011, p. 69, p. 430). He had married the previous April, and he and his pregnant wife were taking a summer

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Modern-day Clerkenwell, close to where Oliver Twist found himself

Continued from page 6...

holiday in Petersham, near Richmond, but the business of journalism and writing novels brought him back frequently to town and to the family home in Islington, rather than staying on his own at his lodgings at Furnival's Inn on Holborn.

The final piece of new evidence about Dickens and Islington concerns the origins of the character and business of Fagin himself. When he was 15, according to Charles Allen in his recent book on Dickens and the blacking factory, Dickens was working as a solicitor's clerk at Grey's Inn, from which he had easy access to the area of Saffron Hill and Field Lane now just on the Islington and Camden border, where Fagin had his den (2011, pp. 28-29).

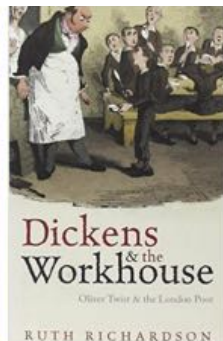
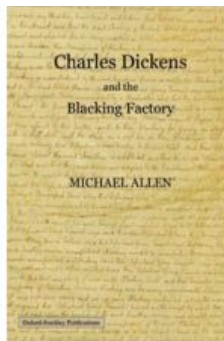
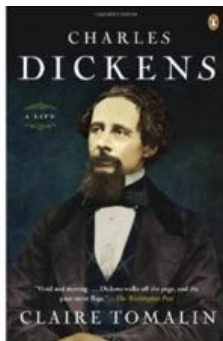
However, when Dickens' family were living in Bayham Street in his childhood, a young man, George Lamerte, was living with the family. This young man had a relative, Uncle Henry Worms, who fell on hard times, and had a marine store in the

Uncle Henry was found guilty of receiving stolen goods, which was Fagin's line of work, and sentenced to transportation (Allen, 2011, p. 33).

Certainly, the link with George Lamerte was a fateful one for Dickens in his childhood, since it was George who offered the family a job for Charles at the blacking factory where he worked as a manager in 1823 (Allen, 2011, p. 85). This was the period when Dickens' father was in prison for debt. For his son, it was in his own words a time of 'humiliation and neglect' (Allen, 2011, p. 87), which powerfully shaped his desire for a life of order and stability, and his depiction of children.

area of Fagin's den. Michael Allen suggests that Dickens as a child of 10 or so may well have visited this shop in the company of George Lamerte, since they explored London together, and that George's Uncle Henry was Dickens' model for Fagin (2011, p. 36). In 1825,

Exploring the theme of Dickens and Islington reveals something of the web of relations with family and work in his life, and something too of the relationship of people and place in the London of his time.



## Clean up days for Finsbury Park announced

By DIANE BURRIDGE

The Friends of Finsbury Park have organised clean up days on the first Saturday of the month from 10.30am -12.30pm. They have also applied for bulbs from Haringey Council, with plans to plant these in and around the Hope Space, and at the flower beds in the McKenzie Flower Garden.

If you want to get involved, the dates for the first Community Clean Up Days in 2017 are: 7th January; 4th February; 4th March; 1st April and 6th May, with other dates to be decided.

If you are interested in helping, please take gloves and a garden trowel if you can; litter pickers and black bags will be provided.

The Friends of Finsbury Park are aiming to make these events fun, and the number of members continues to increase.

Highbury Community Association committee members attend activities where possible to give support to the Friends' wonderful voluntary endeavours to protect and improve the Park, which has been sorely neglected at times in the past. If you want to find out more about the Friends of Finsbury Park or to get in touch with them, visit their website: <https://www.thefriendsoffinsburypark.org.uk>



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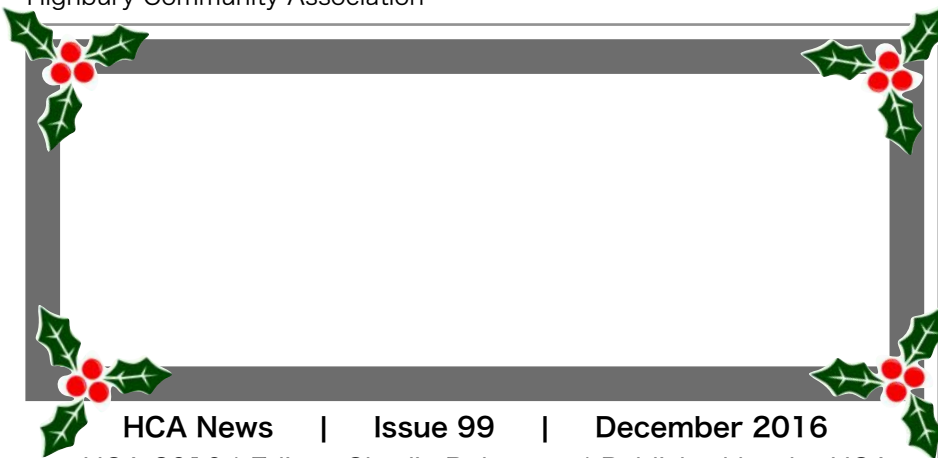
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## Highbury bookshop launches film club

By CHARLIE ROBERSON

Ink@84, one of the most exciting recent additions to Highbury's wealth of independent businesses, continues to flourish and develop as a local cultural gem. In addition to its usual services as a bookshop, café and bar, the Blackstock Road venue will soon be home to the film club Screen84.

Film curators Joe Ursell and Freddy Gelati-Meinert have teamed up with Ink@84 to bring great films to Highbury at an affordable cost. Films will be screened on Friday evenings throughout the year with time for drinks and discussion afterwards. The themes for the club's first two seasons will be World Cinema and Bookish Film Adaptations, with further information released shortly.

To cover the cost of launching the club, Screen84 have set up a crowdsourcing campaign through Kickstarter. The money raised will go towards costs including curator's and license fees, equipment upgrades and technical changes to the shop's layout and electrics. Perks available for donors include free books, tickets for screenings, access to the club's launch party, and even a private screening!

We would urge any Highbury residents with an interest in cinema and culture to give generously to Screen84's Kickstarter campaign. It can be found online at <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/86631295/screen84-highbury-film-club> or via Ink@84's website.



## Step free access at Finsbury Park station due in mid-2018



By DIANE BURRIDGE

The extensive construction work at Finsbury Park station that was started earlier in the year continues. While the building activity has caused irritation for commuters, the improvements that Transport for London (TfL) are making look set to justify the disruption.

On 28 November 2016, an overhead gantry on Stroud Green Road was installed to facilitate the delivery of materials to National Rail platforms 5 and 6. These works are part of the programme to deliver a lift that will serve these platforms, the London Underground interchange level and the Victoria/Piccadilly southbound platforms.

Whilst this gantry is being installed

there will be overnight road closures, between 10pm and 5.30am, for about three weeks - although pedestrian and cycle access will be maintained throughout. These works have been planned with Islington and Haringey Councils, as well as the police, and have the necessary permissions.

Stroud Green Road will continue to operate as one-way for vehicles until Spring 2018 - as it has been since June 2016 due to the worksite on the road.

A new lift shaft to the northbound platforms at the station was due to be completed by December 2016 but this date has been pushed back to January 2017. TfL state, however, that they remain on track to deliver step-free access by mid-2018, and to complete the new Wells Terrace station entrance by 2019.