

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

www.highburycommunity.org

No 45 December 2005

Local Farmers Markets By Susanne Gustavsson

Hooray, we have two farmers markets within walking distance from Highbury:

Saturdays: the Organic Farmers Market in Stoke Newington

Sundays: Islington Farmers Market

But why celebrate this, you ask? So we don't have to shop at the supermarket, of course!

And why would anyone not want to shop at the supermarket? Most of us are aware of the issues surrounding the quality of foods these days: We are aware that we should be concerned about the quality of our supermarket food, and be concerned that although meat, dairy, fruit and veg seem cheap to buy in the supermarket, the quality is thereafter, and the people paying the price for the cheap produce are the 'farmers' ... the cheap prices are not made possible by supermarket profits, as one may imagine.

What has been happening, is that due to the supermarket chains growing huge, killing off local shops, butchers and greengrocers, farmers now have very limited choice in who to sell their goods to, and so if farmers want to survive they have to sell to supermarkets.

This dependence has given supermarkets exceptional power to control the prices they pay the farmer, so they push the prices down, forcing the farmer to accept incredibly low prices for his wares – which of course means, that the cheap prices you enjoy in the supermarket are at the expense of the farmer ... and in addition, the supermarket is still making a profit on your purchase!

As a result of this unfair trading, the farmer, in order to try to make any profit at all, now has to resort to intensify his farming, spraying his crops with pesticides in order to increase yield (all those chemicals in turn affecting the rest of the environment, airquality etc), he has to feed his chickens antibiotics continually as they then grow 5% faster and the list goes on.

In addition to the state of the meat and veg once it leaves the farm, is all the processing that goes on during the journey from the farmer to the supermarket shelf; products are manipulated to "add value" and bring down cost... you can try to read the labels of all the food packaging in your kitchen, or on everything you pick up next time you're in the supermarket, just so that you have an idea of what you're actually eating, but of course "fresh" fruit and veg won't show what they've been sprayed with. Similarly, we have all heard of chickens pumped full of water, but try this little morsel, excerpt from pg. 16 of the book: *"Not on the label – what really goes into the food on your plate"*:

The FSA announced the results of [some tests of chickens from a foreign wholesaler sold in Hull] at a press conference in London in December 2001. Some of the samples of what were being sold as chicken breasts were in fact only 54% chicken. Nearly half of the samples contained less meat than they claimed and were mislabelled. Most had originated in Thailand and Brazil. They had been exported to Holland where they had been pumped full of water, salts, sugars, gums, flavourings, aromas, and other additives which would hold the water in, even when the chicken was cooked."

So, even the "raw" produce is manipulated

with lots of hidden additives, and it's really no wonder that the incidence of conditions like allergies and asthma, especially in children, has increased to the epidemic proportions we see today. These days, an added major concern could be the abovementioned mislabelling of contents, you would for example want to be quite sure you weren't getting poultry from areas with birdflu.

And to finish off, the "Foodmiles" issue: "Foodmiles" is the term for the number of miles foodstuffs travel, before they reach your plate – these days, with all the cheap imports (many of which are imported because they can be sourced cheaper than British farmers can produce them!) most food has travelled thousands of miles before you buy it. And not only has the food travelled possibly thousands of miles in planes and lorries, but the packaging has too! This adds to pollution and congestion, wastes resources, all adding up to an unsustainable use of finite fossil fuels.

So, cheapness comes at a price – but what can we do about that? Well, this is where the farmers markets come into the picture: All the products on farmers markets in London have been produced within 100 miles of London, so the foodmiles are kept down. The stallholders are the farmers or workers who have produced the products they sell, so the money you pay goes directly to the people who grew or reared your product – and if the goods are a little bit more expensive than in the supermarket, it's because you're getting your monies worth. If you want completely organic products, all the produce at the Stoke Newington market is organic, biodynamic or wild.

So visit the markets and take part in a growing revolution.

The Stoke Newington Organic Farmers Market, William Patten School Stoke Newington Church Street, London, N16 0NX. (Just across from "Fresh & Wild").

Saturdays 10 am – 2.30 pm

Parking: There is ample parking behind "Fresh & Wild", turn down the little road which runs alongside Fresh & Wild, and there is a big, and very reasonably priced carpark there.

Buses: 73, 393, 476 (Church St), 67, 76, 149, 243 (SN Hi St)

There is also a playground in a walled-in area behind the market stalls, so the children can play while you shop.

Organic Goods on offer: Meat-stall (beef, lamb, pork, huge selection of delectable sausages, ham, chicken, roasts etc.etc),

eggs, fish, ample selection of seasonal vegetables and fruit, bread stall with wide selection, specialist mushroom/fungi stall, cakes, coffee, seasonal extra stalls, eg. "apple juicing the quaint way", or a turkey stall in December: Order your Christmas meats now, and pick them up on December 24th.

The organisers of this market, Growing Communities, also runs a veg and fruit "Box Scheme", ie. Get your locally grown vegetables every Wednesday, priced at £5 for a small bag, and £8.50 for a standard bag – very reasonable prices. See the homepage, www.growingcommunities.org, for more information.

Islington Farmers' Market, William Tyndale School (behind the Town Hall), Upper Street, Islington. N1

Sundays: 10 am – 2 pm

Parking: On street, no restrictions on Sundays

Buses: 38, 73, 56, 4, 43 & 19

Goods on offer: Very comprehensive list of products, see the homepage for details: www.lfm.org.uk

www.soilassociation.org
www.growingcommunities.org
www.lfm.org.uk/
www.farmersmarkets.net/visit/default.htm

Recommended reading:

"Not on the label – what really goes into the food on your plate", by Felicity Lawrence, ISBN: 0-141-01566-7

See also the HCA homepage for more information on boxeschemes and local markets: www.highburycommunity.org

News from the Highbury Community Association

Dear Members of the Highbury Community Association

The HCA's Committee wrote to you in September to let you know that our Editors, Robert Scott and Alison Carmichael, were unable to edit and produce that month's newsletter. The substitutes have now come off the bench, facing the considerable challenge to replace our first choice Editors-team, and bring you this end-of-the-year edition.

The HCA Committee wishes you a happy 2006

Book Review:

A London Child of the 1870s

By Francis Radice

If you're suffering from the gloom of winter you couldn't do much better than to read this charming book. It's a positive tonic of fun, happiness and innocence – an account of exactly what childhood should be. Molly, the youngest of five, was lucky enough to be born to enlightened and loving parents who allowed them almost unlimited freedom 'to imperil their lives without any sense of fear and to invent their own amusements.' They were given a room called 'the study' which only became one after long years of use as playroom, only entered by their parents to watch one of their plays for which they bought tickets, and used for every kind of game, hobby and display of personal treasures. Only later was it a place of homework and reading.

Molly was not sent to school like her four brothers, until she was twelve. But instead of pretending to be hard done by such inequality she revels in her fortune at not having to learn all the tedious subjects her brothers did at school but could spend more time with her mother, who taught her to read along with the useful arts of looking after a home.

All this took place at 1 Canonbury Park North now alas, replaced by a boring modern residence. But the second half of the book is taken up with a no less delightful account of the family visit to their grandfather's vast rambling farmhouse in Cornwall – a sort of indoor adventure playground cum food bar and zoo, presided over by a benevolent aunt. Here reading, games, practical jokes, impersonations and adventures were the order of the day. Victorian religiosity, when it occurred, far from dampening the family's high spirits, served to stoke them and provide frequent sources of amusement.

The only sadness is the death of Molly's father which she pretends was the result of a traffic accident. We learn that it was in fact suicide following a financial collapse. Despite this we can look forward to reading the rest of this trilogy of her life in the eighties and nineties.

A London Child of the 1870s by Molly Hughes, Oxford, 1934 re-issued by Persephone Books, Lambs Conduit Street, £10.

That Football Pitch By Tony Miller

As reported in the last issue of HCA News, a planning application was submitted jointly by Arsenal FC and Islington Council to redevelop the football pitch at the top of Highbury Fields. A consultation exercise asked that comments be made to the Council by September 8th. A number of HCA members responded. So did members of the Highbury Fields Association, local schools, local traders in Highbury Barn and residents who were directly affected by the proposals.

In fact, the Planning Department was inundated with responses. In addition to the written comments, Jeff Baker received over 600 phone calls on the subject. The principal concerns expressed were whether it was appropriate to lease public open space to a commercial company, that the amenity would no longer be available for casual use by the kids and young people of the community and that the development, with offices and a hall, was unsuitable in an area of Metropolitan Open Land.

In addition there was a feeling, widely expressed, that AFC was reneging on its obligation, a condition of the new stadium planning permission, to provide an alternative to the O2 centre. So instead of the community enjoying two facilities, one public, one private, Highbury would end up with just one which would be commercially managed and regulated.

Faced with such opposition, the Council conceded that it ought to hold a public meeting at which these issues could be discussed. That meeting was scheduled for



HIGHBURY FIELDS FOOTBALL PITCHES – OPEN TO LOCAL CHILDREN FOR NOW

October 20th. The Union Chapel was booked but ten days before it was due to take place the meeting was postponed to allow the Council more time to prepare. In the event, it never happened because on October 20th the proposal was officially withdrawn.

Clearly the Council were taken by surprise

by the reaction to this proposal. Subsequently local Councillors have given assurances that the football pitch will be refurbished though not as part of a bigger scheme. There is no commitment to retain the 'free access' for local kids. So we must watch that space.

House collapses in Benwell Rd

By Trevor Wilson

At the beginning of October, Benwell Road found itself closed to traffic yet again. This time the traffic chaos wasn't due to any traffic calming or building work – it was caused by the collapse of one of the houses opposite the new Arsenal Stadium.

The end of terrace house is next to the old school buildings that were part of the City and Islington College.

Contractors had been clearing former buildings in the school playground and also gutting the interior of the main building. This was in preparation for building new flats on the site.

Part of the old playground borders on to Benwell Road between two terraces of houses. It appears that the contractors were digging a huge hole at this point for new foundations. What they failed to do was secure and under-pin the buildings either side of

this hole. This resulted in number 101 Benwell Road collapsing one morning – with the owner inside! Luckily she was able to climb out through what was left of her staircase. Neighbours were evacuated with safety fears of gas leaks and explosions.

Half the house remained with all the rooms and their contents exposed. Police said at the time that belongings would probably only be retrieved once the rest of the house was demolished or secured. Until this happened, there was a 24-hour police presence outside.

It isn't clear who the building contractors are, or the involvement of the Council's Building Control department, but the Government's Health and Safety Executive were called in to investigate how this potentially fatal mistake happened.



NO 101 BENWELL ROAD, REDUCED TO RUBBLE

A Different Kind of Christmas

By Beatrice Sayers

Ah, Christmas: a perennial problem for those of us who wish to avoid overspending, overeating – and overbearing families. Well, this year, for me at least, the problem is partly alleviated by a rather rare occurrence. It happens once every 19 years, to be precise: Christmas and Chanukah actually coincide.

I say alleviated, not only because I dislike the overindulgences of Christmas, but because I can find myself celebrating but feeling awkward or guilty about it: because I'm not Christian. This year, I can celebrate on 25th December.

When I was growing up, in Finchley, my family used to go abroad for the last two weeks in December. We joined in celebrations at the Spanish hotel where we stayed, but Christmas presents weren't a big deal; I didn't feel hard done by if one year I didn't receive any.

When we were a little older, we stayed in London, and my teenage years were spent at a big Jewish Christmas – the type Nigella Lawson excels in – with my aunt, uncle and cousins.

This year, in Highbury, I've a chance to celebrate Chanukah instead, or – more likely – as well.

Chanukah (the word means "dedication") usually comes in early December – next year it begins at sunset on 15th, and the following year on 4th. It commemorates a miracle that happened during rededication of

the Temple of Jerusalem in 165 BC, following a successful revolt against oppression of the Jews by the Syrian King Antiochus IV. The Jews wanted to light their menorah (branched candelabrum), but found there was only enough oil to burn for one day; yet, according to tradition, the oil burned for eight days.

On the first day of Chanukah, one candle is lit on a chanukiah (a nine-branched candlestick). One extra candle is added on each of the festival's remaining seven nights; the ninth candle is the "helper", which is used to light the others.

Chanukah is not a festival of great religious importance, like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And I personally don't believe in oil-burning miracles any more than I believe in virgin birth, so I guess I've plenty in common with many people celebrating Christmas. But Chanukah, like Christmas, offers light and colour in the depths of winter, when people often need to be cheered up.

Of course the secular celebrations held at Christmas originate in the ancient Winter Solstice festival, connected with worshipping the sun (light) and with finding life (mistletoe) in the dark winter months. And the Jewish holiday is a festival of light that marks the survival of a people; so in fact the two festivals have plenty in common, even when the dates don't coincide.

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Why Highbury?.... Why? When? What now? What next?

HCA interviews Sylvester Stein (1920, Cape Town, South-Africa), an inhabitant of our neighbourhood with a remarkable profile. Sylvester Stein has had a long career as journalist, editor and publisher of magazines and newsletters, first in South-Africa, then in the UK. He most recently hit the headlines when he and Fraser Grace brought his 1999 book "Who killed Mr. Drum?" successfully to the theatre. In his book, Sylvester Stein tells the true story of his time as editor of what was then South-Africa's most famous magazine, Drum. His book offers "a fascinating portrait of 1950s South Africa and the resistance of young black writers to apartheid". The play got laudatory reviews in the Metro, Sunday Independent, Guardian, Sunday Telegraph, What's On, and on Radio 4's "The Critics". Highbury has been Sylvester Stein's home for the last 25 years.

HCA – What brought you to Highbury?

Sylvester Stein – When I married Sarah, she came back to London from a spell abroad. She had been living in the Essex Road area before and now had her eye on Highbury. We started with a few rooms for the first six years and then managed to buy a fine house with a large garden. Highbury has changed over the last decades – they are stuffing this place with more and more people. I remember Coach House Lane when it was nice and empty, with just the coach-house, and a horse and nothing else – see how many apartments there are now!! But the area is great – I meet my neighbours and friends when I am walking my dog Toby in the Fields and I meet them again when I go shopping at the barn. It has such a nice variety of shops, and has all one needs, so we have never once been to a supermarket!!

HCA – What about your editorship at the magazine Drum in the 1950s?

Sylvester Stein – I started as a journalist for the Rand Daily Mail in Johannesburg and quickly made my way up to become its political editor. It was a relatively liberal newspaper, but not liberal enough for me. My transfer to Drum was incomprehensible to my then colleagues: "You don't go and work on a kaffir paper!!" But this editorship at Drum did suit me – I was a liberal white man interested in the black problem. With the move, I left one world and I ended up in a whole new social circle that included people such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. Drum was a magazine written by black writers, for black readers. It was a magazine, so it focused on issues of crime, business, farce & comedy, music, sex, and also politics. The political aspect gave it its uniqueness. Every magazine, even the worst, educates to some extent. Drum taught its black readers, who had been down trodden for such a long time, to value themselves as worthwhile people. It made them realise they had rights and helped bring about the

idea that these had to be fought for. The proprietor however, with whom I had many a quarrel, feared his magazine would be taken off the market by the authorities.

HCA – What brought you to London?

Sylvester Stein – My quarrels with the proprietor of Drum got to a point which made me quit. Also I didn't want to stay in South-Africa, which –we are talking early sixties- felt to me like a place at the end of important political strings, and I wanted to be at the centre. London was an obvious choice with many opportunities. Here in the UK, I practically invented the newsletter, and its marketing. I did so with a Canadian colleague and we were immediately far ahead of our time. As foreigners, we may have been more objective, not hampered by British inhibitions. For example, in those days it was "not done" to write to someone you didn't know, but we just took the telephone directory and sent our newsletter about the stock-market to potential clients in the better neighbourhoods.

HCA – What now?

Sylvester Stein – I have just received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the professional body of my sector of the publishing world – that's just before my 85th birthday on Christmas Day. I am still active in my firm for a few days a week. Nowadays we produce newsletters about issues I am really interested in, education and, even more, sports. My passion is athletics – I am reigning British champion in my age group of the sprint events: 60m indoors, 100m and 200m. I must add that I am a true sprinter, so don't ask me to run 201 metres – I wouldn't be able to do it.

HCA – What next?

Sylvester Stein – I am about to finish the script for a farce entitled "This is your captain speaking". The main character is a man who lives in Kew where the planes coming over his head towards Heathrow every other minute drive him mad. He and his son both have a crush on the lady BBC-journalist who comes to interview him and the two of them talk our hero into taking some extraordinary action. I would be happy to send interested readers a copy of the script and to receive their comments. It could be on stage in a year to come. I am also working on a long novel entitled, "His third, her second". But that will take me another two years... if I get them. *HCA wishes Sylvester Stein many healthy, happy returns in Highbury.*

You can now obtain a copy of the script of Sylvester Stein's brand new play by writing to him at sylvesterstein@btopenworld.com (and feel free to send him your comments).



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The Olden Garden, Whistler Street, N5 By David Fenton

I walk down Whistler Street most days. From time to time I had heard mention of the Whistler Street Gardens but only during the summer did I finally decide to discover the location. Almost opposite number 22 is a door in a high brick wall. It was closed on my first visit but a few days later on a glorious sunny afternoon the door was ajar; I stepped over the threshold into a wonderful expanse of nature – much of it growing wild and stretching as far as the eye could see. Almost immediately I came across Pat Tawn and Tom Jamieson, who were enjoying a quiet afternoon pottering and pulling the occasional weed. Tom is the chairman and Pat is secretary of the Olden Garden Community Project and they told me some of its history.

The Olden Garden was set up nearly fourteen years ago by local residents with the help of the then Highbury Neighbourhood Office. The area had been used as a dumping ground

for rubbish and it took nearly two years to clear and set out an outline for the garden.

Currently there is a formal garden with a clubhouse where members can shelter from the wind and rain, a large circular pond, an orchard area, a meadow strip, a large greenhouse and a wooded area. Although the garden was originally set up for older people, more mothers with babies and toddlers are using the facilities; there is now a designated area for toddlers with a swing and a slide.

Olden Garden has won a number of prizes including Best Environmental Project and a Good Gardening Certificate. The CSV had a project in the garden for five years where they taught landscaping and horticultural skills, including building work associated with gardening. It was a very worthwhile course, given accreditation for a City & Guilds certificate; but funding was withdrawn. The garden was this year handed

over by the council housing department to Islington's Greenspace Department, thus making tenure much more secure.

New members are always welcome – especially if they want to work in the garden and can recognise “weeds”! However if you just want to laze around in the garden you are equally welcome. There are some rules: 1) the garden is open during daylight hours. 2) the garden is especially for older people and is not a play area for children 3) the use of radios/cassettes is not allowed. 4) dogs must be under control and owners must remove any mess 5) drinking alcohol is not allowed 6) anyone causing damage may face expulsion.

Those interested in joining should contact Pat Tawn, Secretary, Olden Garden Community Project, 22 Whistler Street, N5 1NH (020 7704 8678)

Banners everywhere By Roger Wright

So far this year there have been two applications to put up advertising banners on lampposts around Highbury. These applications require Planning Consent and so require approval by the Council's East Area Planning Authority.

In June, an advertising agency applied to erect banners on most lampposts in Drayton Park and in September, Arsenal Football club applied to erect banners in the four streets surrounding Highbury Stadium.

In both cases, after lobbying by HCA, various members of the community and some of our Councillors, these applications were rejected.

However, these cases serve to show the uneven way in which Planning is handled in Islington. When the first application was lodged, the same company sought permission to erect banners in three other streets in Islington, in areas covered by two other Area Planning Committees. In

our area, we were able to point to a previous planning decision rejecting a similar application some years ago, and used this as a precedent to have this year's applications rejected. The East Area Planning Committee was forthright in rejecting this year's applications based on that precedent. In the other parts of the Borough, there wasn't a similar precedent and so the applications were accepted and the banners approved.

With planning approval across the borough fragmented and being the responsibility of four separate committees, what's rejected in one area may well be accepted in another. Once a developer has got an approval in one part of the borough, they try to use it to get a rejection overturned in another part of the borough.

As a result of all this, we don't think that the 'Banners issue' is finished yet and that there may well be further applications next year! Keep your eyes open for any applications.



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Bryantwood Road Permanently Closed

By Rowan Howard

Workmen are currently putting the finishing touches to the structures which will permanently close Bryantwood Road to through traffic. The temporary (now permanent) closure of Bryantwood Road (and the short lived decision to also close Benwell Road) have been controversial and divisive decisions, which have provoked strong opinions locally.

One local resident, who opposed the closures, took this view:

“A policy which allows one group of residents to have all the benefits of car ownership – they can continue to park their cars and use them around Islington and means that they have none of the downsides of car use – through traffic, noise, pollution, safety issues – a policy like this is simply not fair.

It is impossible for road closures to be discussed in a calm and logical fashion because of the basic unfairness of the proposition...we have to find different solutions to the problem of dangerous and polluting traffic”

The irony in this case is that closure was, at the start, the cheap solution, with no money available to slow rather than stop traffic. So traffic calming was never seriously considered for this road. Controversy was fuelled by the fact that no base line traffic surveys were taken for the area before the closures went ahead. Consequently, the expensive surveys carried out after the closures could not provide objective evidence of the effect of the closures. So Bryantwood Road residents said that the closure was good not just for them but for all

of South Highbury, and a majority of local Councillors agreed with them.

Who was right? My view remains that the area around Drayton Park has suffered, and will continue to suffer, from the closure, and that the closure was unfair and wrong. Residents of Drayton Park continue to report heavy queuing, congestion and associated appalling driving. Benwell Road is yet to see its promised improvements completed.

Transport for London has reportedly appointed consultants to look at improving both the Holloway Road/ Drayton Park junction (which they control) and traffic flows in the area. Let's hope they find a solution here before the lorries start using this junction to access the re-development of the old Arsenal stadium next year.

What can concerned local residents do now?

- Press Councillors to complete the improvements to Benwell Road, and to push for Arsenal to fulfil their commitment to resite and rebuild the road's width restriction swiftly
- Lobby TfL to prioritise any possible improvements to the Holloway Road/Drayton Park junction
- Press Councillors to improve pedestrian facilities in Drayton Park
- Report queuing and illegal traffic manoeuvres in Drayton Park to Islington traffic officers

For further information, please contact Rowan Howard at Keep Islington Connected (keepislingtonconnected@hotmail.com)

Christmas services

Christ Church, Highbury Grove

- * Sunday 18th December 6.30pm – Evening candlelit carol service
- * Wednesday 21st December 6.00-7.00pm – Carols round the clock tower
- * Saturday 24th December 11.00pm – Christmas Eve midnight communion
- * Sunday 25th December 10.30am – Christmas Day communion

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Highbury Community Association

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