

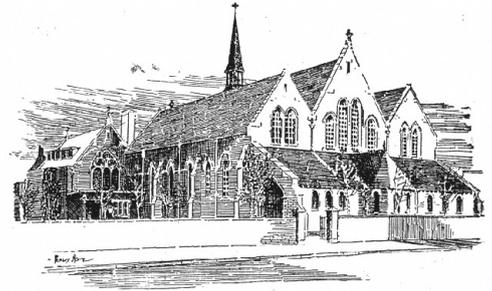
HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

www.highburycommunity.org

No 54 December 2007

St Thomas's Church, Finsbury Park: The early years and some modern parallels

By Rowan Howard



IN 1888 THE streets south of Finsbury Park were newly built. They quickly filled with the lower middle classes leaving over-crowded central London, as the railway and omnibus lines opened up the new suburbs. The Church of England was already present in the form of a Mission Church, meeting first in a small brick building, then in a large temporary iron church.

As the population shifted out of the old City, churches there were becoming redundant. Some were demolished, including St Matthew, Friday Street. The site and fabric of this ancient City church were sold. The proceeds were used to fund the permanent red brick St Thomas's Church at the corner of Monsell Road and St Thomas's Road, dedicated in October, 1889.

The congregation started out bravely: the church was founded to worship in the newly resurgent Anglo-Catholic tradition, a rarity then in Islington; guilds, sporting clubs, Sunday schools, and socials flourished; there were Sisters attached to the Church, and volunteer District Visitors, ministering to the sick and the unfortunate.

By the First World War, in the course of just 25 years, the tide of suburbanisation had left Finsbury Park behind. Many of the prosperous stalwarts of the earliest incarnation of the church of St Thomas's had left with it. The area changed quickly, becoming poorer and needier. The church continued to meet the spiritual and temporal needs of its congregation but the challenges grew.

Open pews – open church

“All the seats are free and unappropriated”. This was the slogan emblazoned on early parish magazines. What this meant was that there were no pew rents at St Thomas's. Instead the church's expenses were to be funded entirely from the free offerings of the congregation.

In Victorian Britain, pew rents were the standard method of securing a regular church income. Members of a congregation would “rent” a pew, with the “best” seats costing the most. The resulting seating pattern was a visible symbol of social hierarchy – with visitors having to take the leavings.

With no pew rents, St Thomas's was an inclusive church

from the outset. This tradition continues – the current congregation reflects the local diversity of race, cultural tradition, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, and economic status.

This reliance on the “plate” offerings caused the churchwardens some anxiety as the parish grew poorer in the 1900's. Many of the parish magazines include reminders to the congregation that, with no pew rents, salaries and expenses could only be paid if they dug deep.

A campaigning church

St Thomas's first congregations showed an interest in social issues. There were lectures on topics such as the opium trade with China. The congregation sent a letter to the Prime Minister protesting against “the Government of a professedly Christian Empire continuing to carry on the manufacture and sale of opium for the sake of revenue, and in the face of all moral considerations”.

The men's Guild petitioned the Minister of Education against the 1906 Education Bill, which attacked state funding for Anglican and Catholic schools. This Bill was eventually thrown out by the House of Lords.

Closer to home, the congregation led protests in 1905 against the proposal to erect a variety hall at the far end of St Thomas's Road. These protests were initially successful, but the Empire Finsbury Park was eventually built in 1910, on the corner of Prah Road and St Thomas's Road. The theatre closed in 1960, and was demolished in 1965. Vaudeville Court now stands on its site, and houses some of the current congregation.

Social issues remain at the heart of St Thomas's response to the world around us. The church's latest venture is to start an evening drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees, opening on Friday, 16th November. It will run fortnightly, from 6.30 to 9pm. The aim is to provide a warm place to spend an evening, with a hot meal, foreign language newspapers, and games such as chess and oware. Volunteers from the wider community are welcome to join members of the church congregation in

(continued on page 2)

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this new venture. If you would like to know more, please contact us at cardinal.jeffry@btconnect.com or visit the website at www.stthomaschurch.info.

If you click onto the website, be sure to read Anne William's account of a visit to "Thomas", a failed asylum seeker, headlined "Meeting a desert father", which inspired her to start this drop-in centre.

To be continued.....

Luckily, the parish magazines for the years 1888 to 1918 have survived, and these paint a detailed picture of life in Finsbury Park before the First World War. The advertisements alone are a treasure trove: Friern Manor Dairy Farm at 56 Mountgrove Road warranted pure new milk delivered 3 times daily, whilst Sister Leonora of St Mary's Lodge, Broadstairs was advertising peppermint creams for sale in aid of the Girls' Home of Rest. Perhaps a further article may be inspired by these? ■

In the meantime, since church records are scant for the years from 1918 to 1989, our amateur historians would be delighted to hear from anyone with memories of the church and its congregation from the "missing years". Please contact cardinal.jeffry@btconnect.com with your memories.

Astanga Yoga Islington By Roberta Giannotti

YOU ARE INVITED to come and try out astanga yoga with me at my new class at St Mary's on Upper St.

At the moment classes run on Sunday mornings in the lovely garden room, a spacious naturally lit wooden floored room overlooking the pretty churchyard of St Mary's.

Astanga is the perfect antidote for a London lifestyle, a contemplative and physical practice that will stretch, squeeze calm and ground leaving you centred and warmed to the core in readiness for the day.

At AYI we practice a Mysore style Astanga yoga, a self-practice with the teacher individually adjusting, advising and nurturing your progress.

All levels are welcome from beginners requiring a full explanation of the breathing, asanas and system of astanga to students with a full practice requiring advice, adjustments and support.

Having been through pregnancy and childbirth (I have a two year old daughter) as well as pregnancy yoga training I am planning to begin antenatal classes soon.

I started astanga some 15 years ago practicing at one of the few centres in London under John Scott. I had

originally trained as a contemporary dancer in my home town of Montreal. I came to London to work with a number of European dance companies, also training as a spiritual healer for three years.

As my interest in Astanga grew I spent many long and happy times in Mysore South India, learning directly from the living master of Astanga as we know it, Sri K Patthabi Jois. He authorised me 5 years ago to teach worldwide and I have been since then working at all the major London centres as well as running regular retreats in Barcelona and Essouira, Morocco.

Astanga Yoga Islington is my first solo studio. From January I will be expanding the Sunday mornings to full weekend, including Friday evenings and Saturday classes.

I will also be running a series of intensive beginners courses.

Should you enjoy the first class enough to book a block of five, I'll offer ten per cent discount on the block. I look forward to seeing on the mats. ■

For more information go to www.astangayogaislington.com or call me on 07977 11 30 32

Eco Congregation in Finsbury Park By Bob Gilbert

ST.THOMAS'S Church in Finsbury Park is in the process of applying for 'eco-congregation' status; a national accreditation open to churches of any denomination that demonstrate concern for the environment in their practice, their worship and their witness to the local community. In our journey towards this we have so far conducted an energy audit of the church buildings, introduced energy-saving measures and switched to a green electricity supplier. In our grounds we have adopted organic methods, encouraged biodiversity and installed recycling facilities. Our most ambitious undertaking to date was our Environment Month. This was a programme of events across September and October, a period which happened to include both

Harvest Festival and the feast day of St.Francis.

During our Environment Month we held children's events – such as our bird-box making session – and spent an afternoon volunteering in the Gillespie Park Nature Reserve. We held a showing of the Al Gore film 'An Inconvenient Truth', had a Harvest lunch and a 'wild food' walk and held sessions on the life and teaching of St.Francis, on the environment and spirituality and on Christianity, Islam and the environment. We also incorporated environmental themes and care for creation into our regular services and our Sunday School sessions. The culmination of all this activity came on the final Sunday – which was also our annual church Dedication

Festival – when we dedicated our 'pledge tree', whose leaves record the individual promises made by individual members of the congregation to take action or to lead greener lives.

We will be applying formally for Eco-Congregation status by the end of 2007, but this will not be the end of our efforts. We intend to continue working to reduce our carbon footprint as a church and as a congregation, and to demonstrate that our environmental concern is rooted in our religious faith, our approach to spirituality and our concern for social justice. ■

If you would like to know more about the work of our Eco Committee, please e-mail us at eco@stthomaschurch.info

Peak Oil and Highbury

By Sally Davis

PRODUCTION OF OIL has passed its peak. The German research group Energy Watch reports that the amount produced in 2006 was the highest ever; after 2006 the number of barrels of crude oil produced will drop by 7% per year, being down by as much as half by 2030. At the 2007 Houston Oil Conference in October, a leading investment banker confirmed this and said that the \$90 a barrel crude oil hit in New York on 19 October was just the beginning. Like any product that's about to run out, the price of oil will go up – and up – and up. And it's worse than that: natural gas production is about to hit its peak too.

Various websites explain this, if you doubt it. www.peakoil.net is run by oil industry researchers and links to publications explaining in highly technical terms why it is certain there will be less and less oil around in future. www.aspo-usa.com is the website of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas. www.postcarbon.org and www.energybulletin.net are more non-specialist friendly. There are also some good books: Richard Heinberg's *The Party's Over and Powerdown*; and Julian Darley's *High Noon for Natural Gas*. Or just watch the price of a barrel of crude go up: www.ft.com: 2.30pm Fri 25 Oct 2007: \$92 a barrel, up 50% since January.

At a seminar on peak oil that my partner, Roger Wright, attended this spring, it was said that the western economy was facing some very stark choices: are we going to use those fast-reducing supplies of oil for petrol and aircraft fuel – or for oil products? I am an environmentalist, I don't like plastic. It takes hundreds of years to begin to rot. But when Roger and I talked about plastic this morning, I ended up wondering how we could possibly live without it. Just think what is made, or part-made, of plastic: mobile phones, Ipods, computers, CDs, DVDs, cables, the wrapping around electric wires, downpipes, lycra, yoghurt pots, credit cards... I could go on and on.

Look around your home and work it out. Some items could be made from other materials. But if Moses was coming down from the mountain now, it would not be tablets of stone he'd have under his arm, it would be plastic. And then there are the other things made from oil: pesticides, fertilisers, shampoo.

How about metals? The bits of a computer that are not made of plastic tend to be made of metals. Cars, planes, ships, girders, saucepans, knives, forks, tin foil...and the world is running out of metals as well. Some figures from the University of Augsburg are telling: Platinum (catalytic converters), supplies exhausted in 15 years or so; antimony (drugs) 30 years; copper (coins, plumbing, wires) 61 years; lead (batteries, pipes, roofs) 42 years; uranium 59 years; indium (flat screen TVs) 10 years at most; gallium (lasers), germanium (semiconductors), hafnium (computer chips) – no one knows, but not long! I haven't even heard of some of these! The bad news? Augsburg's figures are based on current usage. They don't allow for future use in technologies as yet un-invented; nor for increasing demand. If the world were to start consuming metals at half the rate per person that the USA currently does, indium would last 4 years, lead 8 years and copper 28 years. Uranium would last 19 years. This makes a bit of a mockery of the British government's determination to secure our energy supplies with nuclear power, doesn't it? No doubt we can do something about metals running out. We can recycle more. We can develop replacements, as long as they are not based on oil or natural gas, of course! But hadn't we better get started?

So what about Highbury?

What does all this mean, for us in Highbury? We really are facing the end of civilisation as we know it. What can we do, apart from panic? I believe the UK government has already lost the plot about climate change and it seems to think that if it keeps very quiet about the other

problems they will all just go away. Fortunately, not everyone is taking that attitude. There are a lot of exciting ideas out there for using these multiple crises as a route to a happier world.

There is the Transition Towns movement. It is a grass-roots thing: groups of people getting together to formulate something called an Energy Descent Plan: a powering-down to a more locally focused, post oil-dependent economy. Transition Town Totnes is the furthest along the road. They have formed groups to look at these areas: food, transport, energy, health, education, livelihoods, re-skilling, the psychology of Big Change, and how the arts can get the message across. To find out more, see www.transitiontowns.org.

Managing our trip into a post peak oil, low carbon future will be difficult. But I figure that the alternative to managing a controlled descent is a crash-landing into a chaos of war and shortages. There's already Transition Town Brixton. What about Transition Town Highbury? ■

More on Transition Towns in the next Green HCNews Issue in February...

HCA is showing the film 'The End of Suburbia' about peak oil and the USA loaned by Sally Davis, in the Ecology Centre in April. Let's discuss what we can do in Highbury to better manage the inevitable changes of the future.

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Green Tips for a Greener World

By Chris Ashby

One fun way of helping our environment and our world to survive is to get involved in working with the earth, growing food, helping the city wildlife survive. So I suggest people should know more about how they can help look after/conserves local green spaces. Gillespie Park, for instance, runs weekly conservation days where locals work with one of the wardens. I've cut grass and herbs with a scythe to help reduce the soil's fertility there, for instance. I've also helped with hedge laying at Edwards Square, which was great fun, if hard work. I've planted up nesting rafts and floated them out on the Regents Canal, which was lovely as well as increasing the bio-diversity of the canal.

Anything that helps wildlife and also makes our green spaces more attractive must be a good and a green thing to do. It also helps people get healthy and fit. The Olden Garden in Whistler Street is looking for volunteers for their workdays. The LBI Greenspace Events diary has a list of when and where people can help. Lots of local parks have 'Friends of' groups and it's worth people getting involved with them. How about a campaign to get Highbury folk to construct more garden ponds, with all the attendant benefits for wildlife? The council could offer pond liners and plants, for free or subsidised.

As for cycling, I'm biased, but getting involved in a borough London Cycling Campaign group opens lots of green opportunities. For instance, we run bike maintenance workshops, so that people can learn how to look after their bikes cheaply. We organise bike rides. We meet with Council officers to discuss engineering schemes, which should help to make cycling easier and safer. Ken Livingstone is being lobbied hard to implement a bike hire scheme across London, which will help to make cycling easier without the costs associated with buying and keeping a bike from being stolen. Despite this cycling is continuing to increase massively throughout the capital and I'm delighted about that! ■

For further details on any of Chris's suggestions email hcanews@hotmail.com

Four Top Tips

- A five-minute shower will use about half the water and energy of a bath. Reduce your carbon emissions and cut your energy bills!
- Always carry your own re-useable carrier bag for all groceries. Refuse a plastic bag.
- Change your electric light bulbs, as they blow, for energy saving light bulbs, which use 80% less electricity producing the same amount of light.
- Always turn off electrical equipment when not needed and do not leave on in 'power saving' mode.

A Carrier Bag Free Highbury? By Mandy O'Keefe

Modbury is a small town in Devon which became the first plastic bag free town in the UK, in April, this year. The impetus was driven by a young camerawoman who saw horrific plastic bag pollution wounding and killing wildlife, in the Pacific last year. Following Modbury's example, I wondered if we could move towards a plastic carrier bag free Highbury Barn.

With this in mind I telephoned Matthew Homer, from Islington Council's recycling department. He was encouraging and felt there was a good chance that Islington Council would back such a move.

He suggested I looked up the Modbury story on the web. This stresses:

- The need for much homework starting with consulting the website www.messageinthewaves.com which outlines what plastic bags are doing to the environment.
- Educating the local traders as well as the general public why plastic bags should be eradicated.
- Showing the Message in the Waves film to traders at a meeting.
- Including the small corner shop traders
- Researching substitute bags (www.plasticbagfree.com)

The pros and cons of the various substitute bags are actually quite complex and, of course, some traders expect their bags to carry trade advertisements.

This is not supposed to be a blue print of how to proceed but gives some idea of the issues involved. Would you like to be involved in setting this up? ■

Modbury story: environment.guardian.co.uk/waste/story/0,,2067577,00.html

Editor's note: *The HCA would be interested in pursuing this idea, with a view to going plastic bag free at The Barn. If you would like to work on this please email hcanews@hotmail.com.*

Streetcar By Mandy O'Keefe

Do you sometimes wonder if you really need a car? Streetcar may be the answer for you.

Ever since my car was written off some years ago, I have used Streetcar. I find I walk and use public transport more, which is good for me, and the environment, but I do have access to a car when I really need it. I simply book one by internet. My nearest Streetcar is within five minutes walk of me, Riversdale Road. But there are others also very accessible in Younge Park, Baalbec Road, Leigh Road, Highbury Crescent, Highbury New Park and Highbury New Park South. There are many more dotted about Islington and there is even, now, a van for carrying bulky objects. My experience has been that the cars are excellently looked after and the support from their head office always polite and helpful.

The charges for use of a street car are very reasonable. Join! ■

www.mystreetcar.co.uk

GREEN ISSUE NO 1

HCA HAS FOCUSED on Environmental concerns on Pages 3 and 4 of this Issue. We aim to do this again in the next Issue, so you will have two double sided A4 pages with websites and information for reference. The lead article this Issue is on Peak Oil. HCA, with Friends of Gillespie Park, will show a film on Peak Oil, loaned by Sally Davis, at the Ecology Centre in April next year. The next 'Green' HC News Issue is in early February with the lead article by Francis Radice on climate change. If you would like to offer an article or small news item for the next Issue please email The Editor hcanews@hotmail.com ■

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO HELP DELIVER HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Are you in need of more exercise? Do you have an hour or two to spare at the weekend, about six times a year? HCA needs a few more volunteers to join the pool of people who help to deliver the HC News and AGM invitations in the Highbury area.

If you think you might be able to help and would like to learn more please contact Beth Moir on 020 7359 2193 or Elizabeth.Moir@btinternet.com for more information. Thank you.

Au Lac: Restaurant Review

By Chris Scott

NINE OF US dined at Au Lac Vietnamese Restaurant at 82 Highbury Park on a Thursday evening in November. We enjoyed a wide variety of dishes from an interesting menu. The service was a little slow (two members of staff taking orders, serving food and drinks and dealing with the take-away service) but not through lack of activity on the part of the staff who were as always unfailingly polite and charmingly helpful.

Three people chose the Set Dinner C and were generally pleased with their choice. Crispy Duck and Pancakes – delicious, Spicy Seafood Soup – some found this too hot to fully appreciate the more subtle flavours, Chicken with Chilli and Lemon Grass and Mixed Vegetable Fried Rice.

Another of our party was delighted to find that Au Lac was “back on form” and enjoyed Hot and Sour Soup and Duck with Black

Bean Sauce.

Others enjoyed Crispy Seaweed with Sesame Toast – delicious, Prawn and Green Leaf Soup, Beef with Black Bean Sauce – pieces a bit too big, Scallops with Ginger and Spring Onions – nice but a little bland and Duck with Ginger and Pineapple.

My Chargrilled Aubergine with Satay Sauce (much recommended by addicted friends!) was crisply but thinly battered with a meltingly soft middle and an enticingly smoky flavour. Mongolian Lamb had a hot spicy crust, tender meat and a rich peppery sauce. No one had room for coffee...

The cost of the meal averaged £17 per person including beer, wine and service. ■

Au Lac Vietnamese Restaurant, 82 Highbury Park, N5. Tel: 020 7704 9187 Delivery free on orders over £10 within two miles



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Open Day at Finsbury Park Mosque

By Beth Moir

THE MOSQUE IN St. Thomas's Road opened its doors to members of the public on Sunday 30th September. Anyone, of any religion or none, was made welcome. There was a large and informative exhibition, including a video, which covered comprehensively the life of Muhammad, basic principles of Islam, Islam's contribution to botany, geography, science, mathematics, embryology, Egyptology, etc. as well as the place of women in Islam, which is frequently misunderstood. The Safer Neighbourhood Police had a stall, as they are working in partnership with the mosque in the Finsbury Park area.

Willing volunteers were on hand to explain anything on which we wanted clarification. I spoke to the Imam, Ahmed Saad, who showed an interest in the Highbury Community Association and is now on our mailing list. Informal tours of the mosque, including the areas of worship, were conducted. There was an open and friendly atmosphere and a feeling that the members of the mosque were genuinely trying to dispel much of the mystique and uncertainty which had grown up around it, to show that it had changed and very much wants to be a part of the local community and work in conjunction with it.

For me it provided a fascinating insight, helped to dispel some of the myths around the Muslim faith and gave me a greater understanding of its beliefs. ■

Further information on Islam from: www.islam-guide.com
www.discoverislam.com/

Write to: info@nlcentralmosque.com



IMAM AHMED SAAD AT THE OPEN DAY

Highbury Community Association The HCA represents 750 residents and businesses on all aspects of living and working in Highbury, Lower Holloway and Finsbury Park. Run by volunteers, it relies on donations. Send cheques to HCA Treasurer, c/o 83 Highbury Hill, N5 1SX, made out to 'Highbury Community Association'. Send letters or articles for next issue to hcanews@hotmail.com or **HCA News, 83 Highbury Hill, N5 1SX**. Visit www.highburycommunity.org
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