

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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THE HOLLOWAY PIRATES

By Sarah Gerlis

Next time you pass a tower block in Islington take a good look at its roof. This will not be comfortable but it will explain why tower blocks are havens for pirate radio stations. Very high up, unsupervised and near both electricity supplies and a potentially large audience, tower blocks are a perfect place to set up an illegal radio station. Connect an aerial to a transmitter the size of a match box for as little as £500, and a pirate radio station is up and running.

Once based offshore, pirate radio stations are now colonising London. Illegal DJs risk a £3,000 fine and a two year jail sentence. According to a spokesman for the Radio Communications Agency, a division of the Department of Trade and Industry, removing the pirates is essential. "They interrupt the radios needed by the police and there is a real fear that if more of them clog up the airwaves they will affect air traffic control too."

Residents of the Harvist Estate in Holloway have demanded more action to get rid of the DIY DJs who set up a base on the roof of Livingston and Talbot Houses over a year ago. Ted Bedford, Chair of the estate's Tenants' and Residents' Association, is angry that nothing is being done to get rid of pirate radio stations in Islington: "We're constantly complaining about it, but the police and council don't seem to do anything. Until the DTI prosecutes them there is little that can be done, except continual removal of apparatus," he explained.

Pirate radio stations are not static. By moving around they make it very difficult for the authorities to locate them. Removing aerials is not hard, but they can be replaced easily and are often located a few miles away from a transmitter.

lieve that the DTI does not recognise the importance of pirate radio. A DJ at the station said: "If it wasn't for pirate radio then the rave scene would not have happened and nobody would have heard of jungle music. We offer an important service and the DTI just makes a mockery of youth culture. There is a sort of Cold War between us and the DTI and we are constantly playing a cat and mouse game with them."

"There are only about 18 commercial radio stations in London and this is not enough to support the music tastes of the six million people who live here. The DTI needs to accept that the 30 pirate stations offer a service to communities. We should not be labelled as the enemy," he said.

Nick Gratwick, of the broadcasting department at City University, said that commercial radio stations benefit from the DTI's war with pirates. "The government and the DTI have created a huge polarisation between the licensed and the non-licensed radio stations and this suits those who run big business stations such as *Capital Radio*, because they can maintain big audiences and

advertising revenues without the threat of competition," he said.

Most pirate stations are not tempted to get a licence, because they think commercial stations are driven by money rather than by music. Holloway based *Kiss FM*, was once a pirate radio station and many listeners are frustrated with the station's commercially driven ethos. The station is owned by Emap and pays £80,000 a year for a license. A DJ at the pirate station *Rude FM* commented, "Unfortunately, *Kiss FM* is no longer driven by music, its focus is on making money - mainly through advertising sales. Most of us who run pirate radio would rather risk arrest than move into commercial radio because we don't want to lose touch with our listeners".

Pirate stations are constantly trying to keep one step ahead of the DTI. Radio Caroline, Radio Luxembourg and Radio Atlanta were the first pirates to challenge the authorities by transmitting offshore and beyond the reach of British law. Today, rogue DJs go as far as hiding transmitters in ventilation shafts and leading an entirely nomadic lifestyle.

But it looks like pirate radio will reach a dead end when digital radio comes of age. Digital broadcasting will allow commercial radio stations to control the airwaves and leave pirates with no choice but to legalise themselves or accept defeat. ▣

PUBLIC MEETINGS ON ARSENAL'S RELOCATION PLANS

Monday 13th March at 7.30pm, Highbury Grove School

If you can't get to the first meeting or can't get to ask your questions at it, there are two later meetings:

Saturday 25th March 2.30pm, Drayton Park School

Wednesday 29th March, 6.30pm The Fire Station, 84 Mayton Street

* Comments on the Ashburton Grove brief to the Council by 3rd April

* Comments on the Highbury Stadium brief to the Council by 24th March

STADIUM MATTERS

Full House for Arsenal Briefing

The first ever meeting in North Islington's newest and largest community hall in Queensland Multi-Media Arts Centre recently saw a crowd of 280 turn out to hear about Arsenal's plans for a 60,000 seat stadium on the Ashburton Grove industrial site. Residents were joined by local business people whose firms are threatened - and by quite a few football fans, both local and from further afield.

The meeting was called by Islington Stadium Communities Alliance, a working group of residents, community and special interest groups concerned about the impact of a major entertainment complex in this crowded inner-city area.

Guest speaker, Paul Weston, of the Federation of Stadium Communities, warned of the difficulties councils all over the country have with controlling football companies. There is no certain way to prevent fans arriving by car. Legally binding agreements, touted by Town Planners as a solution to this and the many other problems caused by large crowds and frequent use of modern sports complexes, are often unenforceable against wealthy, dominant businesses.

Answering a question from Islington Society Chair, Andrew Bosi, Paul Weston confirmed that Arsenal's proposal is unique. Never before has a football club tried to relocate from one densely populated residential area to another; and it is out on its own in terms of scale too. At the proposed 60,000 seats, it would be bigger than any but Manchester United and Wembley, both of which are on sites four or five times the size.

David Knight, who runs a publishing business in Queensland Road pointed out that several of the larger firms are reluctant to move, new ones have arrived recently, and that there are over 60 businesses and 2000 jobs on the site. Many more quality jobs could be created if the site remains in industrial use.

What's in store for the marble halls?

At a quiet meeting of the new Planning Committee on 15th February, Islington Council set the ball rolling for the redevelopment of Highbury Stadium.

If AFC moves to Ashburton Grove the old ground can no longer be used for commercial sport.

The draft brief that has been issued for consultation recommends the retention of William Binnie's Grade II listed East stand, and possibly of Ferrier's simpler West Stand, provided architects can come up with acceptable plans for their reuse, mostly as housing.

Other suggestions, which closely follow those made by the HCA, include keeping some open space, with public access from Avenell Road and Highbury Hill. The planners have also proposed the inclusion of leisure facilities, such as the Arsenal museum, as well as floating the idea of a health centre or other community uses.

The low turnout at the Town Hall suggests that those most affected are generally happy with the ideas proposed; but some anxieties remain. Although many residents and tenants whose homes surround the site are understandably keen to see Arsenal move further away, they remain nervous about housing densities.

HCA representative, Robert Scott, commented, "As it stands the brief has some good ideas, but, like the Ashburton Grove one, it is much too vague. Assuming Arsenal are keen to maximise the value of the site, they, or the people who buy the land, are bound to push for as much housing as they can get away with - and that could be a lot. Unless the new council is a lot tougher than the old one, I guess there may not be too much sacred turf left to walk on."

Parking scheme to be expanded

The boundaries of the Gillespie match-day parking scheme are to be redrawn once again. The new area, which doubles the size of the scheme, will include Quadrant Ward and the triangle

bounded by Blackstock, Mountgrove and Riversdale Roads.

Residents living outside the present limits have been demanding an enlargement for years; but the Council has been unable to pay and Arsenal has been unwilling.

Strangely, cost is no longer the obstacle it was. So, not only is the scheme being enlarged, but two other long-resisted demands will also be met from next September.

Video-screenings which are becoming more frequent every year, and which attract increasing numbers of fans, will be subject to parking control for the first time.

Also, as the result of a long fight by local traders, 39 of whom signed a petition organised by Tom Kasapis, (of Nick's Butchers & Grocers in the Blackstock Road), businesses within the scheme will finally get a permit for a single vehicle.

The new rules will be generally welcomed, except by those who find themselves just outside the new boundaries and by those, often without cars themselves, whose visitors cannot park.

But doubts are growing about enforcement. This has always been patchy, and every enlargement of the area makes it harder to patrol and so less effective. Because fans all arrive in a rush and because wardens have less than two hours in which to catch offenders, many more are needed than in an ordinary parking zone. Without many more wardens than are currently employed, detection of offences will remain erratic - encouraging fans to 'take a chance'. Judging by the numbers of tickets issued, the current fines are no deterrent.

Other problems are that wardens cannot deal with moving-traffic offences, and cannot ticket cars parked on corners, as this is 'obstruction' and can only be dealt with by the Police. Nor can they distinguish genuinely disabled fans with Orange Badges from those who have fraudulently acquired Orange Badges which enable them to park anywhere. One of the Traffic Wardens, whose normal patch is Westminster, said the scam is happening all over London "It has been going on for a few years now, and there is nothing we can do about it." ■

PASTA TO PLEASE

By Elizabeth Dudley

One of the key things that distinguishes and defines an area is the individuality of its local shops.

Da Rocco's Italian delicatessen has been a feature of Highbury life for more than twelve years. First in Gillespie Road and now on the corner of Highbury Park and Lucerne Road, the shop is a significant local landmark. Rocco was tempting local residents with the most delicious home-made fresh pasta, sauces and other Italian delicacies long before Cherie Blair started popping in.

Sadly, Rocco fears that many small, local shops like his are doomed to close. The latest threat comes from the cost of going metric. New legislation makes it illegal to offer goods in anything other than metric weights and that means small businesses have to spend hundreds of pounds converting their scales or buying new equipment. The high quality scales he uses for weighing out salami, cheeses and other foods are made by a firm called Bizerba. "They are charging £500 to convert from pounds to kilos," he says angrily. "It is too much. There is little help from the government or the council. All we are offered is a leaflet outlining the changes and the penalties for failing to comply. I have raised this with the Islington Trading Standards Officer, but there is no aid and some shops just won't be able to meet the cost involved".

Another problem facing Rocco and other local shops is the decline in business on match days. People like to park outside and pop in for five minutes to buy what they need and have a

quick chat. "Customers just don't stop when the cones are out," says Rocco with a shrug. "Business is down at least a third every time there is a home match."

In the meantime, Rocco is soldiering on. Visitors to his shop encounter the finest, fresh Italian speciality foods: many different cheeses, salamis, prosciutti, sausages and hams; different breads, sun dried tomatoes...various fresh pastas and sauces made daily ...Italian biscuits, pandoro, panetone, tirami-su, home-made ice cream... and three different kinds of marinated olives.

Rocco makes his food himself on the premises: five different tortelloni fillings, two ravioli fillings and four different sauces. The lobster and crab ravioli is superb. Rocco's food is renowned for its freshness, maintained by not making up vast quantities yet by making up food constantly. A little is frozen as soon as it is made, but nothing, frozen or fresh, remains on the shelves for more than a couple of days. All ingredients originate in Italy and only certain, long standing Italian suppliers in London are used; many of these have been well established in this country for over 100 years.

Rocco does not advertise, so new trade comes mostly by word of mouth. He is pleased when Nigel Slater pops in to buy his pasta. Pleased too, that Cherie Blair still enjoys his produce, although nowadays her commitments mean she's not always able to collect the goods in person. ■

Da Rocco Delicatessen:

67 Highbury Park, London N5 0207-359 2670.

Monday to Saturday: 8am-7pm; Sunday: 10am-1pm.

GATHERING MOSS

An enamelled, wood-burning Godin Stove is the welcoming centre-piece of this attractive shop. The atmosphere is warm and friendly too with its Aladdin's cave of ornaments, carved wooden bowls, wrought iron candle-sticks, chunky amethyst crystals, oriental jewellery, pretty glass beads and small pieces of antique furniture. Just now a pretty, figured velvet Victorian nursing chair and a medium sized writing desk are among the antique pieces for sale. Wooden sculptures are much in evidence and goods spill out onto the pavement outside.

Moss Foley and his partner, Sheila Murnane, open Gathering Moss four days a week, including Sunday, as they both run other jobs elsewhere. It makes for hard work but they both wanted a shop

selling the sort of things they love in their own home. Sheila sources the stock from a great variety of suppliers and prices are very reasonable. Moss makes furniture - mirrors, bookshelves, tables or other items to a customer's wishes, out of reclaimed timber, or other materials. "I can usually find the right piece of timber for the piece I'm making. I don't insist on complicated commissions - even a simple window box or a garden seat made out of felled wood can add character to a London patio, and I'm happy to discuss with people how they want it to look. I like using felled wood with the bark left on too."

Sheila's eye for the rich colours of the kilims she's got in recently, printed Indian cottons and her love of incense makes it a shop rich to the senses and a place to linger. It is certainly a good place to look for gifts - one of the few in that part of the Blackstock Road.

There are cards too, some of oriental gods and others depicting Christian Saints decorated with Florentine style gilding.

Gathering Moss opened for business exactly a year ago, in February 1999, so this month is something of a celebration of achievement. Sheila said "The year has gone quickly - I still feel there's masses to organise and buy in, but the shop is full of goods and people do seem to appreciate our things. The Godin Stove is always on. We got it from someone who imports old and damaged ones from France and then refurbishes them. The good thing about them is that they burn very little fuel, but put out a lot of heat, so are environmentally friendly." ■

Gathering Moss 193 Blackstock Road, N5 Tel: 354 3044

Open Thursday, Friday and Saturday 11-7pm and Sunday 11-5pm

ARTISTIC TALENT ON DISPLAY, PLEASE!

It is rarely easy for artists to find exhibition space in the competitive world of North Islington. Hidden talent often remains hidden for good - but now Queensland Multi-Media Arts Centre (QMMAC) is calling for artists to contact the Centre Director to book space in an exhibition to be held there later this year. Are you keen to show your work, meet other artists and take part in this public exhibition? Call the number below to find out more and tell your friends too.

Musicians and performers are also invited to join the Arts Centre to help prepare the Centre's display for the annual Islington International Festival. The Festival is to be held at the end of June - with a parade as usual down Upper Street.

Regular day and evening classes in a great variety of activities are available at QMMAC. Classes range from RSA CLAIT accredited computer courses, HTML Web Site Design, Saxophone & Jazz Music classes, Bass Guitar, Creative Drawing & Painting, African Art Classes, Acting, Singing Classes, Graphic Design, Yoga and Dance. More classes and opportunities start every month and the Centre welcomes people of all backgrounds and abilities.

Ring **0171 619 0459** or just drop in and ask for the Centre Director. *Queensland Multi-Media Arts Centre, 26-38 Queensland Road, N7 (just off Benwell Street).*

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We have received a number of generous donations in the last few weeks. Many thanks to all of you. You keep us in business!

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0171 226 2105

EVENTS

- At the **Islington Ecology Centre**, Drayton Park (Tel: 020 7354 5162)
- 14th March at 7.30 - 9.00pm** "Footsteps in the Sky" - Allen Bordoley gives an illustrated account of his journeys in the Himalayas over 40 years
- 28th March at 7.00 - 9.00pm** Friends of Gillespie Park AGM - All welcome
- At **Art to Zen**, 27 Upper Street (Tel: 020 226 5300)
- 6th & 7th March at 7.30pm** *Coeur Simple* play Songs of the Countryside, a programme evoking rural life in England and Ireland. Tickets £15 to include a 3 course meal.
- At **St Thomas's Church**, St Thomas's Road
- 8th April at 8.00pm** *Highbury Chamber Choir* perform Tallis, Byrd, Victoria

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or email: pauline.gerlis@talk21.com
by 10.04.00

Highbury Community Association

The HCA represents 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, 132 Highbury Hill, N5 made out to Highbury Community Association.