

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 19 June 2000

Football is a strange business; and one of its oddities is that, according to its apologists, it has nothing to do with violence - especially not mindless, drunken, racist or nationalistic brawling and looting.

When such things occur - whether in Denmark, in Belgium or in the Blackstock Road, we are solemnly assured that they are not as bad as reported; and that it is not football fans who are to blame. By definition "real" fans never do such things. This convenient argument saves politicians and football promoters from facing reality and accepting responsibility. But, ask the police or ask the hundreds of men who poured out of the Blackstock Road pubs following Arsenal's defeat by Galatasaray, to trash the Turkish kebab shops and terrorise Kosovan refugees, and they would say yes, they certainly are football fans.

In truth, aggression and hooliganism are inseparable parts of the English football experience. They are also embedded parts of English (as distinct from British) culture, and have been for centuries; as commentators - from football academic Rogan Taylor to journalist Jeremy Paxman - have acknowledged.

Football is not the underlying cause, but it is certainly an effective one; as, indeed, is alcohol. Having given the world football, it seems the English are now giving it our brand of hooliganism too.

Yet our local politicians blithely assure us that we should welcome professional football as a source of Civic Pride. Sod that. They may be proud if they wish, while the rest of us hold them in deserved contempt for their pusillanimous failure to condemn and tackle this source of local and national shame.

Think again Steve Hitchens, Meg Hillyer, Andrew Bosi and the rest - and be grateful most people from outside don't know that "Highbury the Home of Football" is in the borough of Islington. If you are serious about Civic Pride, take care it stays that way.

Here in Highbury we would prefer to be able to take pride in living peacefully and without fear of attack in a culturally vibrant and ethnically diverse community, where all can expect respect from their neighbours.

HOLLOWAY HOME FOR SURVIVORS OF TORTURE

By Alison Carmichael

"Amnesty sent me and my 5 year old daughter to stay with a family in Norfolk at Christmas time. The food was so strange! But the people were so very kind. They even gave us stockings with oranges and presents under the tree. It was twenty years ago and they are my family now." Irma Gomez has made her life in Highbury since she escaped from El Salvador in 1980, in fear of her life and knowing she could no longer live in hiding with her child. The holiday convinced her that she could cope with living in England and that she could make friends here.

Providing holidays for people who, like Irma, have sought refuge in the UK is a vital part of the huge variety of work done by the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. Madeline Blakeney, volunteer at the Foundation, told Irma and other Highbury Community Association members last month at the HCA AGM that refugees and asylum seekers have nearly always lost their network of friends and family. Life can consist of visiting official after official and getting endless forms and documents together; and their only 'identity' is as someone dependent on others. *"A holiday is different. The clients I can find holidays for become simply 'people on holiday'. I am really pleased sometimes to be able to match interests and skills between the clients and the host families. Recently a new volunteer host from the far north of Scotland who worked as a potter, with her own wheel and kiln, rang me to offer a holiday. I put the 'phone down to her and then interviewed a young man who was an artist and sculptor before fleeing his country. They had a wonderful time together, making pots*

and sharing skills and ideas."

The Medical Foundation is a unique charity, the only organisation in the UK whose work is dedicated to providing medical treatment, practical assistance and psychotherapy to survivors of torture and organised violence. Currently based mainly in Kentish Town, and working out of three buildings, it has recently launched a public appeal to raise the final millions needed for a new, purpose built centre, near Isledon Village, N7. This will bring all the care under one roof, making it this area's busiest hands-on charity. Over 20,000 people have been offered professional, medical, legal and practical care and advice to re-build their lives since the charity was established, in 1985, through the energy and vision of one woman, Helen Bamber. Last year alone staff treated over 3,300 people from 88 countries.

Helen Bamber, in her mid-seventies and still working as the Director 6 days a week, not only meets and helps personally some of the 50+ new people who seek help every day at the Foundation, but is also the UK's foremost spokesperson and defender of human rights, sharing her staff's expertise with Oxfam, Save the Children and the World Health Organisation. *"Most of the people we see have been forced very recently to leave their countries to escape human rights violations, either because of the religious or political beliefs they hold, or because they are caught amidst terrible ethnic cleansing. We are very flexible with how we approach each person's experiences and problems. Often this means getting*

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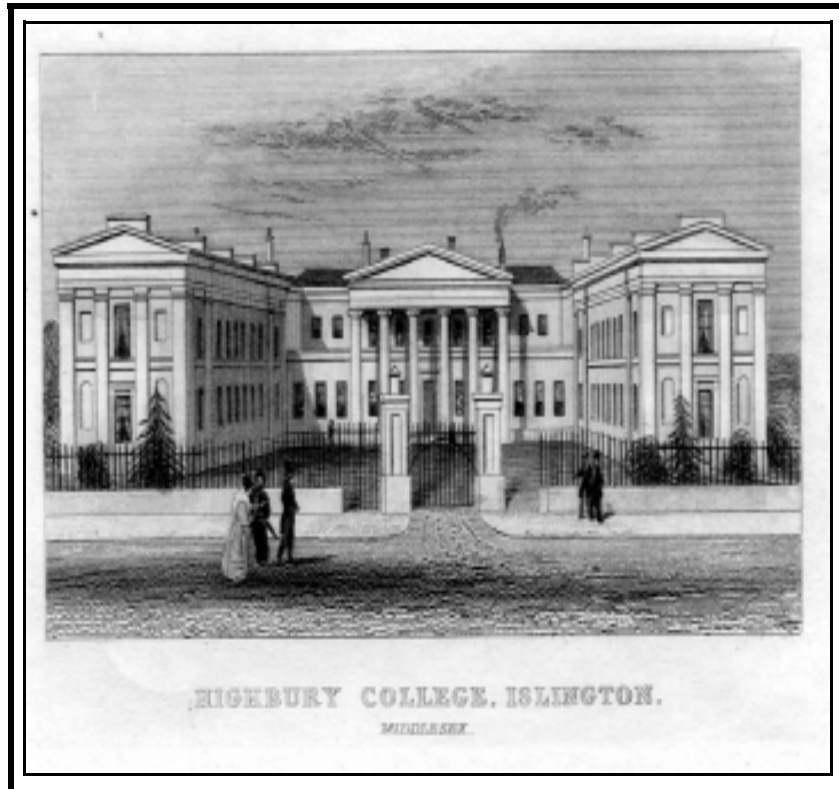
HIGHBURY HISTORY - Mark Mason dips into the archives

Walking along Aubert Park, past the block of flats at Aubert Court, it is difficult now to imagine that for 120 years this was the site of Highbury College.

The College was built in 1825 as the home for a Congregational theological training college, which itself originated as the Mile End Academy in 1783. The six acre site, stretching down the hill from Aubert Park to Gillespie Road, was purchased for £2,530. The College was designed by John Davies and

built at a cost of £15,000. Thomas Wilson, one of the first directors of the London Missionary Society and a founder of London University, was its treasurer from 1794 until his death in 1843.

The engraved view, dating from around 1850, shows a handsome classical building with two wings, dominated by a portico supported on six ionic columns. It fronted Aubert Park, at that time named College Road, and was described as having a beautiful view from its garden or back front towards Highgate, Hampstead and Hornsey.



In 1834 there were 28 students, but its fortunes declined and in 1849 the College was sold for the sum of £12,500 and became the Church of England Metropolitan Institution, a training college for schoolmasters. In 1863 it became the Church of England London College of Divinity (St John's Hall) and the buildings were enlarged, including the erection of a large chapel at the corner of Aubert Park and Avenell Road. In 1884 there were 68 students.

In 1913, the College playing fields were let to the Woolwich Arsenal Football Club. In 1925 Arsenal purchased the whole site and Highbury College became their tenant. On 2 May 1946, a disastrous fire gutted the library and west wing of the College. The ecclesiastical authorities had found the ageing buildings expensive to maintain and it was decided not to rebuild the College, but to clear the site and redevelop it for much needed housing. The Aubert Court estate was built on the site. ■

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something practical sorted out the same day – a place to live, furniture or immediate medical care. Or people get referred to our treatment teams of physiotherapists and practitioners or to our Legal Advisor.” She explains that the Medical Foundation also sees people who have taken years to seek help. Chileans who arrived here 25 years ago, survivors of the Holocaust in the 1940s and people such as Eric Lomax, Japanese POW survivor (author of ‘The Railway Man’) have been clients. “Our work with Eric Lomax led us to groups of other Far East prisoners of war, who also wanted, finally, to speak about what happened to them with people who are trained to listen.”

Helen Bamber’s experience is that newcomers to the Foundation are often suffering from a complete loss of identity – having been articulate, self-sufficient people, maybe highly educated doctors, teachers, politicians or land-owning farmers, they become lumped together as ‘asylum seekers’ and often can no longer provide for their families or children. Men often feel less able to cope than women, who still have some role in the family, if there are children they can look after.

Much of this was certainly true of Irma Gomez, who was the Headmistress of El Salvador’s only School for the Blind, and a respected and valued leader of her community. “I gathered my friends

together and asked them what I should do, as 300 teachers had been killed. I had no choice but to leave my home; my daughter was only little and needed me.” She has spent much of the last twenty years teaching disabled and visually impaired children here in the UK.

With more clients being referred every year, the 95 paid staff and 83 volunteers at the Medical Foundation are looking forward to the eventual move to the new site in Holloway. They hope it will be ready to move into by 2003.

- ◆ Donations and enquiries to Medical Foundation, 96-98 Grafton Road, NW5. Tel: 020 7813 9999
- ◆ Very many thanks to Irma for telling us her story. ■

AFC briefs approved - just

Islington Planning Committee approved the briefs for Ashburton Grove and Highbury Stadium by 4 votes to 3 after a very rushed consultation lasting only six and a half weeks. Over one hundred amendments were made, but the briefs remain vague in many areas.

In spite of many articulate speeches from the floor - on both sides of the question - the committee struggled to understand what was proposed; and many valid points got lost in the general confusion. Amazingly, for a scheme that depends on public transport, this topic was not even on the agenda for public discussion; but councillors did insist on feasibility studies to see if more than 80% of visitors to Ashburton Grove could come by means other than private car.

Unfortunately this is meaningless as they forgot to insist on any penalties in case there are more cars than expected.

ISCA complains about procedure

Islington Stadium Communities Alliance has lodged an official complaint about the conduct of the planning meeting that approved the Arsenal briefs. It is calling for the decisions to be quashed.

ISCA alleges the committee ignored several important Standing Orders and broke their own rules of debate. HCA member, Robert Scott, commented, "It was a bigger shambles than usual. Nobody wants a Council that is obsessed with procedure, but if you don't stick to the basic rules, you end up with bad and invalid decisions. In this case it meant members were ill-informed; and the Chair prejudiced the debate by allowing the developer to speak at the wrong time. This sort of complacent arrogance is very insulting to electors".

The Council's official response is expected shortly. To find out more, check the ISCA website at www.redcard.org.uk

First news of plans for old stadium

Provisional plans to convert Highbury Stadium to housing have been revealed.

As required by the brief, the East and West stands remain and will be converted into 132 maisonettes. Two tall rectangular blocks of flats replace the North and South stands. Behind the North stand a new mews is proposed and, at the southern end, a block of social housing, making about 270 units in all. Parking will be underground. The pitch area will remain as open space, but the developers have not said how it will be treated. Calls for it to be open to the public seem unlikely to be met; and there is no proper pedestrian access through the main site from Avenell Road to Highbury Hill.

There are still no plans available for a new stadium in Ashburton Grove. Arsenal director, Ken Friar, said the plans keep being redrawn as more problems surface. ■

COUNCIL IGNORES NEW POLICY

By Nicola Freshwater and Andy Parkinson

When we first heard about the proposal to build a three-bedroom house at the bottom of the garden of 1 Petherton Road, our first thought was "Why would they allow such a development in a conservation area?". The area, hidden by a Victorian brick wall, currently contains garages for the original house, a Grade II listed building, and is attractively overgrown with mature shrubs and trees, many of which are a mass of blossom in June.

We wrote to the Council suggesting that the development was not in keeping with the spirit of the conservation area, and pointing out that the loss of parking for 1 Petherton Road, and additional cars from the new house, would add to existing parking congestion and could make difficulties for emergency vehicles.

We decided to put together a petition listing our objections to the development. We found that everyone, without exception, was keen to sign. There were those who said "It won't do any

good, it's a foregone conclusion", but we thought if we don't try, we'll never even know if we could

have made a difference. Four neighbours attended the Planning Committee meeting, and were allowed three minutes to reiterate the objections and hand over the petition. None of the objections were addressed by the committee, nor did they discuss why they felt it was appropriate to allow this development in a conservation area. Most of the comments revolved around the fact that it was a "nice design".

The planner's report revealed that the development goes against the Unitary Development Plan Review policy to "retain garden land". The issue of parking congestion was not considered at all, nor was there any discussion of whether there was actually any need to build this house. It certainly won't be an example of affordable social housing! The duty under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or ap-

pearance of conservation areas when considering planning applications seems to have been side-stepped in order to allow building in gardens in an area which the planner himself described as having a "spacious and distinguished character".

Our experience suggests that neither local feeling nor Council policy itself seem to cut much ice with the Planning Committee when "considering" their decisions. Maybe those who said it was a foregone conclusion were right after all. ■

AGM AND PARTY

Over 60 people attended the HCA AGM in Christ Church. Those present agreed to keep membership free to all. 2 members, Cathy Daniels and Trevor Wilson, joined the committee. We enjoyed Madeline Blakeney's talk reported on the front page - and also the food and cooked dishes generously prepared and donated by members. Particular thanks to these, to those who did the washing-up, to those who gave money and especially to Tony Wood for donating the wine.

St Paul's Shrubbery Festival 2000

Saturday 8th July - from
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spicy food, barbecue, cakes and more

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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.