

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 34 July 2003

Building Bridges

By Alison Carmichael

Living in the glare of the media spotlight is hard, no matter what the reason. Harder still if the press interest provokes hostility fuelled by prejudice and ignorance. Fadi Itani is Executive Director of the Muslim Welfare House, which is on Seven Sisters Road next to Finsbury Park Station and not far from the 'Finsbury Park Mosque', once a place of prayer for over a thousand local Muslims, but now closed to all, and notorious by association with the controversial cleric, Abu Hamza.

"The tragic events of September 11th and the backlash against Muslims has been a major issue for our charity for 18 months now, made worse since the nearby Mosque became the focus for a frightening police raid in January this year." said Fadi Itani, who is well-known as a voice of reason speaking on behalf of Muslims everywhere. *"However, I think the fact that we were here, already working with one of the largest and most diverse of Muslim communities in the UK, has been helpful. That September we were completely overwhelmed by the number of people ringing and visiting to see how they could help and to offer support to our local Muslims. It was wonderful and very heartening to experience."*



MUSLIM WELFARE HOUSE VOLUNTEERS

Muslim Welfare House was founded in 1970 and was one of the first ethnic-minority, community organisations to have been established in the UK. It is a multi-purpose centre providing a very wide range of services, which address the varied needs of a community of about 20 different nationalities, many of whom have been 'settled' here for years; but others are what Fadi Itani calls 'new arrivals'. The

aim of the centre is to build bridges between the different communities, teach life-skills, and so enable people to engage positively with their surroundings, thus preventing isolation, with all the many problems that can cause. 250 people use the centre every day to learn everything from dress-making and design, to IT and to how to start and run a business. As well as three part-time schools run for local children, there is an after-school tutorial club for 60 children, while under-achieving ethnic-minority children attend Homework Clubs



FADI ITANI MEETS VISITORS AT THE OPEN DAY IN MAY

in core subjects such as English, Maths and Science. There is a quiet place set aside for prayer, which is heavily used, with up to 1500 people praying at the Friday service, conducted in Arabic and the common language, English. The sense of calm and quiet in the old building makes a very surprising and welcome contrast to what must be one of the most unpleasant, and heavily used, stretches of pavement in London. It is here that the noise of traffic reverberating under the railway bridge and the litter, dirt and graffiti combine to remind visitors that this is one of the most deprived areas of the country.

Working with the grass-roots of a community is essential to Fadi Itani's vision. Achieving anything is always a challenge but he says the mix of problems faced by this community is made worse by the peculiar bureaucratic inefficiencies experienced by people and institutions trying to function in the epicentre of three boroughs. *"I call it the 'heart of the horrible triangle' - Islington, Hackney and Haringey! It makes communicating with communities even harder. We have had an uphill struggle convincing the local councils to wake up to the need to support these people."* It was in order to reach out to other sections of the community, particularly the non-Muslims in

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

the area, that a very successful weekend, 'Discover Islam', was held in May this year. "We were amazed by the numbers who came to our centre to learn about Islamic art, see our Mosque and find out what our religion is about. In two days 1200 people visited the centre. Many people unfamiliar with Islam were surprised to find out how simple the religion is and also how much Christianity has in common with Islam."

A month later, Reverend Stephen Coles, of St Thomas's Church, Finsbury Park, who believes faiths must work together to prevent simplistic representations in the media damaging relationships, invited Fadi Itani to preach the sermon one Sunday. Fadi Itani said "I had never been to a church service before, let alone spoken, but I was made very welcome." Reverend Stephen Coles had this comment to make "He was extremely well received. He challenged the Christians. He said '37 million people described themselves in the last census as Christians, if not as church goers – so where's the evidence?' A very good line!"

Fadi Itani is including the politicians in his drive to make connections between people and groups. Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North, is hoping to hold regular surgeries in the Muslim Welfare House with the aim of reaching Muslims who feel marginalised by western, non-Muslim society. "We are currently organising the next 'Discover Islam' which we think will last a week and include the schools." said Fadi Itani. "I know of course we cannot change the whole world; but for sure we can change bits of it. The bad we have all experienced does seem to be producing some good." ■

Muslim Welfare House 233 Seven Sisters Road, N4

Tel: 7263 3071 www.mwht.org.uk

A hadith, or saying, of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) formed part of the sermon given by guest speaker, Fadi Itani, at St Thomas's Church, Monsell Road, Finsbury Park, by invitation of Revd Stephen Coles:

Do you know what is the right of the neighbour?

If he asks you for help, you help him.

If he asks you for a loan you lend it to him.

And if he becomes poor you give him generously.

If he falls sick you visit him.

When he dies you attend his funeral.

When he gets good news you congratulate him.

If he falls into trial you console him.

Do not extend your building without his permission so you do not block his light and air.

Do not harm him.

When you buy fruits give him some; if you do not, then enter your home quietly. And do not let your child take the fruits out to show off to his children.

Do not disturb him with the smell of your cooking; if you do, give him some of it.

Do you know, what is the right of the neighbour?

I swear by God no one will fulfil the rights of their neighbours except those who have been blessed by God.

Shopping at The Barn

1500 people signed a petition against the sudden enforcement of parking controls at Highbury Barn shopping parade. HCA members have reported several inter-connected problems.

Without loading bays the shops are unable to function; and with the removal of all parked cars and lorries the traffic speeds through at an alarming rate. Shops depend on trade from locals and visitors who park for short periods but, since there are no designated parking bays, drivers often park inconsiderately, causing unnecessary congestion. Cllr Laura Willougby said "We are currently discussing options with officers. In the autumn there will be a consultation on the east side of Highbury for a full-time controlled parking zone and we can look at pay and display bays in the local area as part of this." ■

HCA Committee 2003-04

Chris Ashby – Bryantwood Road

Alison Carmichael – Highbury Hill

Nina Evans – Avenell Road

Susanne Gustavsson – Riversdale Road

Mandy Sosta – Plimsoll Road

Robert Scott – Highbury Hill

Trevor Wilson – Bryantwood Road

Roger Wright- Highbury Hill

Lis Yorke – Highbury Hill

Contact the above via hcanews@hotmail.com

OR Secretary Susanne Gustavsson Tel: 7354 2974

OR Alison Carmichael Tel: 7359 5731

Raffle Raises Funds for Romanian Charity

Over 50 HCA members heard, at the HCA AGM held at Christ Church in May, about the Myosotis Trust. This British charity was founded about 7 years ago to improve the quality of life of needy people of all ages in Barlad, Eastern Romania. The Trustees answered questions about their latest trip with donated goods to Romania. "This was undoubtedly our hardest visit to Romania in 7 years. The poor are getting poorer and the rich, richer." said Janet Wastall, one of the Trustees whose husband, Peter, told the meeting how getting the lorry in is getting harder. "The border guards are ruthless and demand large sums of money. Also if our load contains any second hand clothes or bars of soap we risk the whole load being confiscated." However, their work is having a good effect as children who, a few years earlier, had been undernourished and living in a psychiatric hospital, were now happy, healthy children well cared for and loved by foster families.

The evening ended with a party and a Raffle, which raised over £130 for the Trust. Thank you to all the members who came to the AGM and helped make the evening such a success! ■

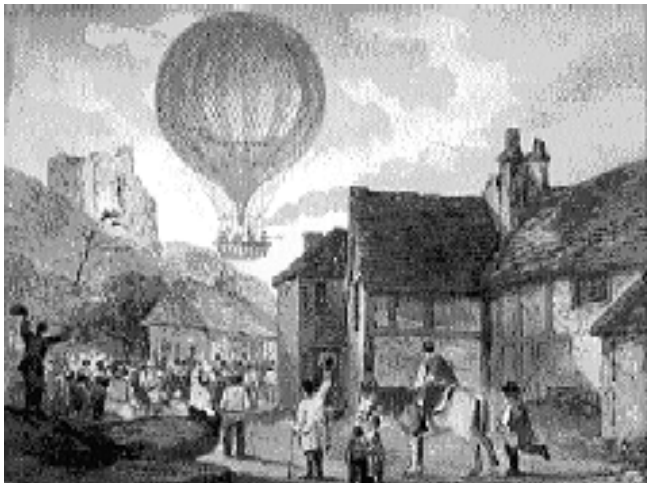
Myosotis Trust, 36 Whiteheath Avenue, Ruislip, Middx HA4 7PS Tel: 01895 625767 myosotistrust@hotmail.com

The Aeronauts of Highbury Barn

By Roy Hidson

Passengers alighting from the Piccadilly Line of the tube at Finsbury Park will notice a motif on the decorative tiles depicting hot air balloons. This is an allusion to the part played in this area by pioneers in the field of aviation.

The first, manned balloon ascent was made in Paris in 1783, and the next year the first flight in England was made by the Italian, Vincent Lunardi, who ascended from the Artillery Ground in Finsbury. Nearly 200,000 people are reputed to have witnessed this flight, on which Lunardi was accompanied by a dog and a cat. The earliest balloons were filled either with hot air or with hydrogen; and Lunardi's was a hydrogen balloon, known as a 'Charlier' after its French inventor, Professor Charles.



GREEN'S 'ROYAL VAUXHALL' BALLOON, SUBSEQUENTLY RENAMED THE 'NASSAU' BALLOON TO COMMEMORATE A PIONEERING CROSS-CHANNEL FLIGHT THAT WENT FURTHER THAN INTENDED!

A leading balloonist of the early nineteenth century was Charles Green. His contribution was to introduce coal-gas as a safer and much cheaper alternative to hydrogen. This he did on the occasion of George IV's coronation in 1821. The Highbury connection arose from his friendship with a Barnsbury solicitor named Edward Spencer, who became one of twelve passengers to ascend in Green's giant balloon 'Royal Vauxhall'. Constructed of red and yellow silk this had a capacity of no less than 85,000 cubic feet. In 1837, both Green and Spencer were involved in the fatal accident that befell Robert Cocking, who unwisely insisted on jumping from the 'Royal Vauxhall' using a novel form of parachute in the form of an inverted cone.

Spencer made some 40 flights as opposed to Green's 526. Spencer had two sons, Henry and Charles Green Spencer, the latter being named in honour of his father's friend, who also became his godfather. Charles is credited with introducing the velocipede, an early form of bicycle, to Britain; and he taught Charles Dickens to ride. An active gymnast, he is said to have devised the vaulting horse. His firm, Spencer, Heath & George fitted out the gymnasium on the Titanic.

Charles had eleven children. The eldest, Percival, was born in

1865 and founded the firm of Spencer Brothers of Highbury, whose balloon factory and offices stood near the sites of the London Metropolitan University on Highbury Grove. He made his first ascent with his father at the Crystal Palace and, on several occasions, crossed the Channel by balloon. His brother, Stanley, was the first Englishman to design an airship and was visited at Highbury by Count Zeppelin. As early as 1903 Stanley attempted to fly from Crystal Palace to St Paul's and back again; but a strong wind obliged him to continue northwards as far as Barnet, to the disappointment of the assembled crowds.

Henry Spencer was the first to drop from an aeroplane by parachute; and the Highbury firm was prominent in the development of the parachute and of airships. Henry's younger brother, Herbert, another pioneer aviator, became the licensee of the Highbury Barn Tavern and died in 1949.

Charles, who died in 1913, had two daughters Juliana and Marina. Both were pioneer aviators and parachutists and Marina died in Los Angeles in 1963, at the age of 94.

The Highbury Grove site became the headquarters of A. C. Cossor Ltd. Alfred Charles Cossor left his father's firm of scientific instrument makers, previously based in Clerkenwell. Cossor produced radio valves, then kit radios and, from 1930 complete sets. They were producing cathode ray tubes as early as 1902 and in 1918 did electrical work for Marconi. In 1962 they became the first UK firm to make X-ray tubes in this country.

Over time Cossor expanded and occupied the "Aberdeen Works". Cossor eventually ran out of space in Highbury and moved to Harlow. The original instrument business had moved in 1917 to Vale Road N4; and now specializes in making sphygmomanometers. The Highbury factory was occupied by Hilger Watts, also scientific instrument makers. Subsequently, it served as the offices of Ladbroke's the bookmakers. Hence the name "Ladbroke House". Finally, it became a Department of the Polytechnic of North London, now the London Metropolitan University. ■



CHARLES GREEN HOLDING HIS SPECIAL BAROMETER, USED FOR ESTIMATING ALTITUDE

HCA Website

The HCA website is launched with this Issue of the Newsletter. Over the summer months committee members, led by Susanne Gustavsson and Trevor Wilson, hope to make it useful and entertaining, particularly for people new to the area.

One feature will be a complete archive of HC News and there will be links to other relevant websites and updates on recent news. The site is designed to be interactive to encourage as many people as possible to contribute.

The design is in the early stages - so expect plenty of changes - and please tell us what you think would be helpful or fun. Email HCA Committee on hcanews@hotmail.com and keep checking the website as it develops on

www.highburycommunity.org

Complementary Therapy

Indian Head massage (Champissage) is now a popular complementary therapy. It is beneficial for stress and stress-related conditions e.g. **insomnia, tension, headaches**.

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Danger at the Barn?

The pedestrian extension and road narrowing at the top of Highbury Hill is proving controversial, with complaints from drivers, cyclists and pedestrians, who consider the new arrangement dangerous. Cllr Terry Stacey is listening to residents' views and says the Council is considering placing a speed table or hump across the road.

HCA would like to hear members views on what has been done and what is proposed.

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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, 75 Highbury Hill, N5 1SX made out to "Highbury Community Association".

Send letters or articles for next issue to: HC News, 83 Highbury Hill N5 1SX or email hcanews@hotmail.com

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