

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

www.highburycommunity.org

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FIGHTING THE SUPERBUG

By Sue Reid

On 20 October this year I found myself standing amongst a large group of people shivering in the windy rain outside the House of Commons. People in the queue for admittance stared curiously at our banner. 'TOGETHER WE CAN BEAT THE SUPERBUG.' Did they know what this was? Did they even care?

No one came up to ask

If they had, I'd have told them. Nearly all of us had either contracted MRSA – the hospital 'super-bug' - or had a relative affected by it.

There were others there too. People who were angry with the failure of hospitals and governments to tackle the problem – and angry at their attempts to conceal the truth about the problem.

Today we were going to put our case to the people who had the power to do something about it.

What prompted me to get involved? Nearly two years ago I had an emergency operation. A day or two later I was informed there'd been an outbreak of MRSA in the hospital. I didn't know much about MRSA then but I did know that it posed particular risks to anyone with an open wound. And I had a very big one! I was scared.

If I'd known then what I know now, I'd have been still more scared. And during the year after I left hospital practically every time I opened a newspaper a word leaped out at me. MRSA! The bug seemed to be rampant – striking terror into the hearts of anyone facing hospital admittance.

It certainly terrified me. I was awaiting a second major operation. But did MRSA pose as big a threat as the papers



DEMONSTRATING OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT IN OCTOBER
PHOTO: SCOTT HORNBY, THE SUN NEWSPAPER

made out? Or was it just press 'spin'? And then – through my researches – I discovered that an organisation had been set up to help support MRSA sufferers and to campaign to get the problem tackled. Perhaps they'd be able to answer my questions.

I spoke to Tony Field, the founder of MRSA Support, himself disabled by the superbug. Through him I learned a lot more about MRSA – and what could be done to combat it. When I explained that I was about to go back into hospital, he sent me a booklet. This told me ways I might protect myself. I also learned the sheer scale of the problem facing our hospitals. The bug is endemic in most hospitals in the country – private as well as NHS. Anyone can get it – the young as well as the elderly. It was as big a threat as the press had made out. And worse:

'By denying there is a problem and deceiving us all with figures the NHS has betrayed its principles and let us all down,' Tony told me.

Was this also true?

What is MRSA? The initials stand for '**M**ethicillin **R**esistant **S**taphylococcus **A**ureus'. Staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium that lives on many of us without causing us any harm. It becomes a problem when it gets into the bloodstream – and it can do this through even a tiny cut. The reason that it's a problem is simple – the bacterium is resistant to most antibiotics – even a powerful one like Methicillin.

Research has proved that the bacterium is present in the air on dust particles – especially in hospitals. It can be breathed in and spread through contact with a carrier. As hospitals don't use disinfectants to clean wards any more, the bug is now able to grow on the cleaners' mop-heads.

It can survive indefinitely on a surface – even on clothes or curtains around a hospital bed - where it can then be picked up and transferred to another part of the hospital. When I read this, I despaired. How could anyone control a bug that can spread so easily? However, research also shows that there *are* things that can be done to help reduce the risk of infection. Proper hand washing is one – though in itself this isn't enough. The wearing of face masks by medical staff in close contact with patients – something that most dentists do already – another. (Once it was standard practice for all medical staff to wear face masks to reduce the risk of infecting patients.) Vacuuming the wards to get rid of dust – another simple but effective method to control the spread of the bacterium.

Tony Field tries to get hospital Infection Control departments to take copies of his booklet to give to patients. My hospital was sent a copy. They read it, but told me they weren't interested: *'It might scare the patients,'* they said.

At least I had my copy and I was determined to follow its advice, as far as I could. I knew that a lot would also depend

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on things outside my control. One more thing had helped to reassure me – according to my hospital's Head of Infection Control they'd not had an outbreak of MRSA since the last time I'd been in – well over a year before.

This, I soon learned from a long-stay patient on my ward, was simply not true. There had been an outbreak of MRSA on her ward a month or so earlier. Tony Field was right.

If hospitals were prepared to cover up rather than confront the problem, I wondered, could anything be done? I think it can – if enough people care enough.

And that was how I came to be standing in the rain that grey October morning. At our lobby, I put my question to Dr Reid, secretary of State for health. I attempted to put another to Michael Howard, leader of the official opposition.

In bed that night, listening - half asleep - to Radio 4, a word caught my ear. 'MRSA.' I sat up. Michael Howard was lambasting Tony Blair for the government's failure to tackle the problem of MRSA in our hospitals. Both parties were going for each other – hammer and tongs. Would anything change? I thought wearily. I remembered the words on our banner: 'Together we can beat the superbug.' But by campaigning today and on many other occasions MRSA Support has at least brought the problem out from where it has lain hidden in the dusty hospital corridors, and it was getting a proper airing. It's a start. ■

Contact: Tony Field on 0121 476 6583, or email: info@mrsasupport.co.uk website: www.mrsasupport.co.uk

Revolting Rubbish

By Angela Sinclair

Living alongside Arsenal has drawbacks besides matchday parking problems. Car-owning friends visiting residents first have to scour the area for a vacant Pay & Display Bay, then, to reach their destinations they must plough through the crowds standing about - and through enough accumulating rubbish to fill several skips.

The fans aren't all to blame for the mess. An hour or so after their arrival all the nearby rubbish bins are already overflowing, so it's understandable they're then encircled in yet more discarded paper, bottles and surplus chips, while garden walls nearby are edged with rows of empty bottles and beer cans. The match once over, the fans leave, dropping further junk anywhere around as they go. Everyone has to wade through this ugly mess.

Surely there are possible solutions to this aesthetic eyesore: many extra rubbish bins, or even skips, around the stadium on match days, including special ones for recyclable stuff, outside Arsenal tube and on nearby corners. Or, perfectly possible traffic wise, a quick round by the street cleaners to empty all the rubbish bins - while the match is on and fans safely installed inside the stadium - in preparation for their second time use. The surrounding roads are then deserted, empty and quiet. Wouldn't this be more labour saving for the



MATCHDAY AT ARSENAL TUBE STATION - PHOTO BY DUNIA SINCLAIR

poor bin men than having to go round a dozen surrounding streets afterwards to pick up all the trash?

The Council's latest recycling instructions should make such an arrangement quite easy. Paper, flattened cardboard, glass, cans and plastic bottles can all now be discarded mixed together, without being sorted first. All that would be needed is marked recycling bins to put them in. With the service I'm suggesting, their contents would contribute nicely to improving Islington's deplorable recycling record. Can't AFC and LBI work together to implement this environmentally constructive proposal? ■

Bryantwood Road/Benwell Road

Over 100 people attended the East Area Committee meeting on 21st October. The Officers Report recommended that Bryantwood Road be permanently closed and traffic calming installed in Benwell Road. However, the Transport Officers changed their recommendation at the last minute due to 'a number of late representations' received by the council and recommended that Councillors should not confirm the closure of Bryantwood Road. Councillors voted accordingly to continue the 'experimental' traffic management order. Speed humps will be installed in Benwell Road, with a raised table and a right-turn filter lane from Drayton Park.

Rush hour queues in Drayton Park are longer than pre-Bryantwood Road temporary closure. Predictions are congestion in the area will worsen once the hundreds of new homes in Drayton Park and Benwell Road are built. ■

Short Books getting Bigger

By Tim Newark

Life is too short to read long books - or that was the initial theory behind a radical new publishing house in the heart of Highbury called Short Books. "We wanted to bridge the gap between journalism and publishing," says co-founder Rebecca Nicolson. "We were looking for 40,000 word essays, books from journalists with something interesting to say. But now, it's grown somewhat and we're looking and acting more like a normal publisher."

That's a bit of an understatement. With top name authors - such as Ferdinand Mount and Francis Wheen - keen to have their latest work published by this small publisher - and with a best-seller called *Change the World for a Fiver* selling in supermarkets - they are now on the verge of becoming a big small publisher.

"We were fed up with the corporate world of national journalism," says other co-founder Aurea Carpenter. "We'd worked at the Sunday Telegraph for years and wanted to get back to something we could become completely immersed in." So they set up Short Books in 2000. Now, many people might think of setting up a publishing house and it's not that difficult to get a book printed, but selling it is the hard bit. "Fortunately, we only gave up our jobs once we'd struck a distribution deal with Faber. They sold the books for us and we've learned a lot from them."

Four years later and they've got a growing and fascinating list of books. For Arsenal fans, there's a biography of Arsene Wenger written by Jasper Rees who has interviewed the star manager's friends, family, players and rival managers. Rebecca is a bit of a fan too. "I'm really going to miss the old stadium," she says.

There's a forthcoming biography of Camilla Parker Bowles that goes behind the tabloid tales to convey a real portrait of her love affair with Prince Charles. But some of Short Books titles have more modest ambitions.

How to be a Bad Birdwatcher tells you to simply stare out the window and enjoy looking at birds - don't let bird watching get in the way. Written by RSPB columnist Simon Barnes, it is a book about not wasting time as much as anything else. "It is remarkable how much of our lives we spend doing things we don't really want to do. More remarkable still is how much time we spend doing stuff we think we are enjoying, only to realise later on that it wasn't enjoyable at all," says Barnes. "I feel these things very strongly when I look back at *The Wasted Years: the years when I wasn't bird watching, or even learning the Observer's Book of Birds by heart...*"

Other Short Books titles give a quirky view on serious topics. There's *My Brief Career* by Harry Mount, an amusing account

of one man's hellish year as a trainee lawyer, and *I'm a Teacher Get Me Out of Here*, a vivid account of a young teacher in an inner-city school. Nicely designed small hardbacks with a price tag of £9.99, it's starting to look a little like the territory claimed so successfully by rival small publisher Profile Books with their massive best-seller *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, the humorous book about punctuation that is getting on to a million copies sold. "Well, that would be nice," says Rebecca. "but I think the first achievement in publishing is to keep going - and so far we're not losing money."

They are now expanding into other areas of publishing and have produced a series of children's books about famous historical figures and are even venturing into the world of fiction with rights acquired to a Swedish novel.

Rebecca and Aurea and their families have both lived in Highbury for many years. "We love Highbury Fields and Highbury Barn," says Aurea. "I must admit I pride myself on shopping every day at the Barn - and hardly ever use the supermarkets," says Rebecca. "If those shops were ever to disappear that would be a disaster."

Short Books is run from the basement of a large Victorian house on Highbury Fields. "It's great to be involved with every aspect of the publishing process from commissioning and editing all the way along to publicity. That way we know exactly what's going to come out the other end and we can be proud of it."

Any budding local authors, however, should be warned. As I glanced at their desk I saw submissions from London's top agents, so Short Books is rapidly attracting big attention and cannot accept unsolicited contacts. A list of their recently published and forthcoming titles can be seen on their website www.theshortbookco.com ■



AUREA CARPENTER (LEFT) & REBECCA NICOLSON

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Yoga for all



SARAH MACKINTOSH

Have you been stuck at a desk for too long? Or you're not doing quite enough exercise or the right kind, to keep your muscles and joints supple? Maybe you just never have time to do anything for yourself. Or you have a particular joint or back problem that would benefit from gentle stretching and attention to posture. If so, and you have never tried Yoga before, then Sarah Mackintosh's classes at the Ecology Centre on Thursdays could be a revelation.

"It's a mixed ability class and I let people work at their own pace. In fact most people haven't done much yoga before. I don't think there is anyone it is not good for – although it doesn't follow that the same kind of yoga is ideal for everyone." Sarah concentrates on teaching postures, breathing, relaxation and concentration during her hour and half long classes. After nearly 30 years of teaching yoga, Sarah's experience shows as she encourages people to try the positions and advises on how to protect or improve an old injury. A recent convert to her class is Pam: *"It is very important for me not to feel the teacher is disappointed in, or critical of, my inability to do something – Sarah creates a very warm and friendly atmosphere. I also like not having to book a whole course or term – I go when I can, although I'm making it a priority."*

Each week Sarah goes through a different selection of Asana postures, sometimes the suppleness of the back is the focus, other times the leg muscles take precedence, but each week will see most areas of the body exercised in a slow and steady way. The class always ends with Pranayama (breath control), which is especially welcome for those used to a frenetic lifestyle. The final 15 minutes ends with relaxation. Why not try it?

Men, women & children welcome. £5 each. Just turn up, wear loose clothes. Mats provided. Thursdays 6pm-7.30pm & 7.40pm-9.10pm, Ecology Centre, Drayton Park. No classes 23rd or 30th Dec and planned to recommence 6th Jan. Confirm this with Ecology Centre. Tel: 7354 5162

SEASIDE HOLIDAY OR WEEK-END BREAK?

Wooden beach-house by the sea close to the Broads in Norfolk £200 per week, £90 for weekend. Please contact Caroline Bucknall on 0207 704 8761

Watch out!

Our shops are now seriously under threat from Lib-Dem traffic and parking policies. Another year of platitudes from Councillors could be too late. This was forcefully brought home when CRS Domestic Appliances at The Barn, after 34 years of trading here, announced a 'closing down' sale in November. Owner Charlie Sarnes says *"My customers can't bring vacuum cleaners here for me to fix anymore."*

Why do this council's transport officers seem to ruin everything they alight on?

Are they being directed by the mono-maniacal anti-car lobby with their unsustainable, shortsighted policies? Or can the lead Lib Dem councillors not control them?

The shops were already struggling a year ago, when HCA wrote to Officers and said: install a minimum of 35 dedicated Pay & Display Bays – and most important – limit them to 1 hour or even half hour parking. We said Pay & Display Bays are needed on the East side of Highbury Park – north of Stringray. Others supported our views. Officers ignored all the advice. Shops are struggling even more and there are

noticeably fewer customers than there used to be, especially on a Saturday.

Cars parked north of Stringray do not block the buses or other traffic passing through the Barn, nor do they obstruct cars exiting from Hamilton Park. This is the widest part of the road so six Bays could easily be installed. Who knows, they might be the saving of a shop or two over the next year.

Our shops get about 20-30% of their turnover from people who stop off by car. If our shops close down, the majority of us who walk to the shops will soon have nowhere local to shop.

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HCA	You like the newsletter? Don't forget to visit the website for more stories — and the chance to make your own contributions!
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Don't miss!

Christmas menu at Small and Beautiful
171 Blackstock Road.

3 courses for £15.50 Cash or cheque. Tel: 7359 9068

Dishes include:

Warm goat cheese with garlic mushrooms and sunflower seeds, Oregano chicken with chorizo, roast red pepper, red onion & crispy salad.

Xmas venison hunter pie slow cooked in red wine and herbs with red pepper, carrots, onions, celery, mushrooms and garlic

Stuffed pepper with Mediterranean vegetables & feta cheese, garnished with marinated courgettes and yoghurt spinach

Strawberry crush cake with crème de fraise liqueur and much more.....

Dates to remember!

Christ Church, Highbury Grove;

† 19th December, 6.30pm – Carols by Candlelight with Islington Choral Society

† 22nd December, 6pm-7pm – Carols round the Clocktower, mince pies, mulled wine

† 24th December, 11pm – Midnight Communion –all ages

† 25th December, 10.30am—Christmas Day Service

St Thomas's Church, St Thomas's Road:

† 24th December, 3pm – Children's Service

† 24th December, 11.45 – Midnight Mass

† 25th December, 10.30 – Christmas Day Service

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

HCA interviews Jonathan Firth, a successful and versatile actor who has developed an interesting CV with performances in radio, theatre, and feature films, but more prominently in very high quality television work. One of his memorable roles in UK TV was his strong portrayal of a passionate and complex Sergeant Troy, in the 1998 Granada production of Far From the Madding Crowd, directed by Nicholas Renton. Jonathan Firth can be heard most months on Radio 4, often playing the lead, or as the narrator, in a variety of radio plays and book readings. He has made Highbury his home for the last 7 years.

HCA - Why did you choose to live in Highbury?

Jonathan - I knew I didn't want to buy in Chiswick, where I lived before moving here in 1997. North London seemed familiar, maybe partly because I trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama in Swiss Cottage. I was in *The Lulu Days* at the Almeida in 1991; and although Upper Street was nothing like it is now, it was still lively and exciting. We spent a lot of time at Le Mercury, which hasn't changed! I loved The Screen on the Green too. Most of my work and meetings are in Central London – so Highbury is great for that. The only stressful exception is getting to Shepperton Studios for an 8am start!

HCA - When did you first work in TV?

Jonathan - After graduating in 1989 I was pleased to get a part straightaway in the serial *Centreport* on Channel Four. It went on from there, and I did a lot of TV drama of various kinds. I played Fred Vincy in *Middlemarch* in 1992, which was fun to film. It's a wonderful book, not particularly easy to adapt but this was done well. Then I left the TV studios to spend a year on stage with the RSC playing Henry in *Henry VI* in Stratford, London and then an amazing 3 months on a world tour to Japan, Manila, Brazil, Chile, Los Angeles and lots of European countries.

HCA - Which part have you enjoyed playing the most?

Jonathan - Definitely it was playing

Sergeant Troy in *Far From the Madding Crowd* in 1998. It was a real joy to be part of that production. I admire Hardy's writing and especially that novel. Playing Prince Albert in the BBC's production of *Victoria and Albert* (2001) was good too. I'd never played someone's whole life before – from 18 years old to 50-ish and I enjoyed the challenge. Acting has its downsides too! The make-up took 2 hours to apply and my head was shaved for his receding hairline. Wearing a very realistic false beard to play Joshua in a Biblical epic was highly irritating – you can't move your mouth much, or laugh at a joke 'off set' because bits become unglued. I couldn't bear the process of having the make-up girl dab glue and bits of beard back onto my face. It was a funny sight, 'tho, seeing a group of bearded actors laughing at a joke with hands firmly clamped over their mouths to save their beards from falling off.

HCA - What now?

Jonathan - I've been relatively busy – but I always think I could be busier! However, I think I've been pretty fortunate over the years. This year I've done a lot of voice-work - radio plays, Book At Bedtime and so on. I read for Macmillan's and Chivers' Press Audio Books too. Right now I'm rehearsing the lead in a Radio 4 adaptation of Proust's novel, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. It's a 6 parter, starting in February.

HCA - What next?

Jonathan - I've just realised, much to my amazement, that I've lived here longer than anyone else in this building. I'm not planning to move – even if I could in this market. I know many immediate neighbours, the Barn shops are great and I'm close to my favourite Stoke Newington restaurants too. As regards work – I have an agent in Los Angeles and will probably go for a month after Christmas, doing the rounds to keep my name in people's minds. You never know when a really big part might come up! ■

'In Search of Lost Time' - BBC Radio 4: 6th February – 13th March 2005



JONATHAN AT HOME IN HIGHBURY

Highbury Barn Pedestrian Route - road layout between Christ Church and the Barn shops

By Christine Mabey of Living Streets

This 'safety' scheme built in February 2003 requires you to look both ways - at the same time - at traffic coming from 5 different directions. Despite an outcry and meetings with Councillors and officers all we achieved was a raised table. So last December Living Streets together with HCA and Highbury Fields Association carried out a survey (the results were reported in an earlier newsletter). The overwhelming majority - 9 out of 10 - thought the crossing unsafe. We presented the findings to a meeting of East Area Committee when Councillors asked the officers to go away and find a safer solution. We met officers, made suggestions but we heard nothing and nothing happened.

Suddenly without warning 3 days before a Committee meeting we were told there was a report. To our amazement what was proposed was a traffic island in Highbury Hill just before the junction with Leigh Road.

At the meeting in September we tried to relay the general local view that the proposal would not help pedestrians wanting to cross between the Barn and Christ Church, that the problem was not mainly speeding vehicles in Highbury Hill but of having to look in both directions simultaneously, speeding vehicles turning from Highbury Grove, and that what was needed was a layout so that when crossing we only have to check traffic from one direction.

Unfortunately, the Committee did not accept the arguments, voted 6:1 in favour of the transport officers' recommendation and, miraculously £10,000 had been 'found' that afternoon to build the island. So sometime soon you should see a traffic island being built. In total the Council will have spent in excess of £80,000 at this junction. Would you say that's money well spent?

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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, 79 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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