

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

www.highburycommunity.org

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The Highbury Highwayman

By Roy Hidson

Like many areas of London at the end of the eighteenth century, Islington was still an overgrown village and was policed by Parish Watchmen. The growth of London and an increase in the crime rate led to the Government taking action. In 1829, the Metropolitan Police Force was established by Sir Robert Peel. The 'New Police', as they were called, were far from popular. The 'Peelers' in London, as they were later in the United States, were recruited largely from among the Irish community. In 1830, Islington's Parish Watchmen were replaced by the Metropolitan Police and Islington became part of N Division.

At the same time another body was appearing in London, consisting of men no less courageous and dedicated than the police. The London City Mission is a Christian organisation which went into the poorest and most dangerous parts of London, preaching and giving what comfort they could to the wretched inhabitants. Each body held the other in high regard, as the Missioners were accepted in areas where the police could only enter in force.

By 1842, Highbury was still an area of open country, but had become the scene of highway robberies. The robber, Thomas Cooper, had been described to the police by his victims and a watch was kept for him. On May 5th he was recognised by Constable Charles Moss while he was stalking another victim. Cooper saw the Constable approaching and fled into the fields. Moss cornered him under a hedge but was shot and wounded in the right arm by Cooper, who was armed with two old cavalry pistols each a foot and a half long.

Moss continued the pursuit, but collapsed from loss of blood and Cooper escaped. However, by now a dozen men had joined the chase, one of whom was Constable Timothy Daly.

The chase continued for two miles across open fields when Cooper ran onto an open road and was cornered in a cul-de-sac in Highbury Park. Cooper stood with his back to a fence defying his pursuers. Mott, a baker out on his round, attempted to apprehend Cooper by rushing in under his guard but was shot and severely wounded. Daly, tried the same tactic but was shot through the heart and killed. Unable to reload his pistols, Cooper was seized by the rest of his pursuers.

The Inquest was held at Highbury Barn Tavern, the verdict being "Wilful murder by Thomas Cooper." Daly's funeral route from Islington Green Police Station to his last resting place in St John's churchyard, Upper Holloway, was lined by between 400 and 500 police officers. Daly's widow was granted a pension of £450 per annum by Police Commissioners, Rowan and Mayne.



THOMAS COOPER SHOOTS CONSTABLE DALY AND HIGHBURY BAKER, MR MOTT

At the same time a London City Missioner reported a melancholy duty he had to perform in the same area. 'On May 2nd, 1842, a policeman named Quain, was murdered by some burglars in Highbury. The day after, a missionary in an Islington district called to see the widow, and found her almost distracted.

"Sir," she exclaimed, "They have murdered

my husband. I have cried 'til I cannot cry any longer. My heart is ready to break. What shall I do?" "It must be a fearful sorrow and a heavy burden to bear, my dear friend, but you must cast the care upon the God of the widow, in fervent prayer, and you will get relief."

He called again a few days after, and found the poor woman in increased distress.

"My poor husband's friends," she said, "who are Irish, came and dressed the body up, and then had a wake over it. They all got drunk, and made a dreadful row, and I am afraid of the Funeral time." "I will act as your friend," the visitor replied, and then opening his Bible, he read comforting words, and again engaged in prayer. As he saw her frequently, a friendship sprang up between him and several members of the force who came to visit and arrange matters with her.' ■

EGYPTIAN DANCE COMES TO Highbury

By Annelise Szwan

Egyptian Belly Dance or Raqs Sharqi, (literally 'Eastern dance') is a beautiful, sensuous women's dance, with its roots in ancient Egypt.

Suitable for all women, this dance is a fun way to learn a traditional oriental art form. In Egypt dance is an expression of joy, with women dancing together at celebrations and family gatherings - not just a cabaret act but an important part of cultural life. Raqs Sharqi will improve your flexibility, posture and general fitness as well as doing wonders for your self-esteem - an excellent way to keep up those New Year's fitness resolutions!

I am a graduate teacher of the Raqs Sharqi Society and have been teaching since 1998. I perform at cultural events

and private celebrations, as well as on TV and in the theatre. I was attracted to the dance by my love of Middle Eastern music and the beauty of the movements, which express a powerful female sensuality. Seeing the famous Egyptian, Suraya Hilal, and her company perform at Sadler's Wells in 1990 finally inspired me to learn the dance myself.

In 2002 I went to study the dance on its home territory in Cairo with prominent dancers working there. What struck me most was the joy my teachers expressed in their dancing and the importance it holds in all strata of Egyptian Society. In Egypt everyone dances including shopkeepers and chambermaids in the hotel. A dancer is a must for a wedding; if this is too expensive the guests go to a dance show. This, no doubt, explained the bride I saw, (in white bridal gown complete with train), with bridegroom and two friends sitting drinking a bottle

of whisky at 4.00am watching Randa Kamel in a nightclub in Heliopolis!

The classes I run draw on yoga and Pilates techniques and encourage students to develop the good postural habits which will enable them to dance with ease and fluency. However, the most important aspect of my role is to cultivate students' enthusiasm for the dance and to provide an encouraging environment in which to develop their confidence as performers.

If you want to discover your inner performer or you simply enjoy dancing, come along to learn in a relaxed, supportive atmosphere. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and bring a scarf for your hips. This is a drop-in class, no need to book. ■

Monday 6.30pm-7.30pm Islington Ecology Centre, 191 Drayton Park. £6.00 (£5.00 unwaged)

Annelise: **020 7359 1983**



Tiger Lil – where is she now?

This small, stripy tabby-torty cat with some beige as well as grey and black markings, went missing from her home near Highbury Barn shops at the end of October 2004. She answers to 'Tiger' and has a distinctive Siamese-type miaow. She is micro-chipped and registered missing with Battersea Dogs Home. If you think you may have seen her – even if you are not sure if it is the right cat – OR you know someone who might be feeding her – please ring her owner who wants to know she is ok. Tel: 7359 0707 or email hcanews@hotmail.com. Thank you!

LOST CAT, STRAY DOG – WHAT TO DO?

LOST:

1. Distribute notices around neighbourhood, near shops, and pubs, use large writing, clear photo,

do not use too many words. Give date pet went missing and from where. Make notice waterproof.

2. Always register your lost cat or dog with Battersea Dogs Home, local animal charities, all local Vets. For dogs ring police too and council animal warden—**7527 3222**.
3. Check with Islington Council cleansing services for information on any dead pets found in the road.

FOUND:

If you find or see an animal you are pretty sure is lost - report to Battersea Dogs Home - **Tel: 0901 477 8477** and put up notices. By law, found dogs must be reported to police. Animal warden will collect a stray dog. Take advice from Battersea Dogs Home about whether or not to feed an apparently lost cat - not all are lost!

SUCCESS STORIES:

A few months ago, in the space of a couple of weeks, phone calls to Battersea Dogs Home helped re-unite 'Old Black Dog found in Highbury' and 'Small Pure White Cat' with their respective owners. The person who found the old, lame dog in Highbury and took him in for a few weeks

thought he must be locally owned, but rang Battersea Dogs Home, just in case his owner had reported him. The old dog's elderly owner lives in Tufnell Park. She had reported his disappearance to Battersea Dogs Home so the two were re-united - against many odds you might think!

'Small Pure White Cat' was an even more unusual story. Residents of Aubert Park and Highbury Hill noticed a very small, white cat, which was scavenging in dustbins and which became upset if approached. One lady managed to take him in to feed him for a week and reported having found him to Battersea Dogs Home. He then escaped from her flat and continued to scavenge in Highbury Hill and Aubert Park. However, his owner had found out from Battersea Dogs Home that a cat like hers had been temporarily 'found' in Highbury and was now roaming free again. She was very surprised since she lived in Spurs territory in Tottenham! So she put notices up in Highbury and someone else responded to the notice and rang her when the cat was again spotted in Highbury Hill. She got here quickly and she and her cat were re-united. He had been 'lost' for 3 weeks. ■

Vera Birkett – a true Highbury lady

By Christine Mabey



There cannot be many regular users of Highbury Fields who do not know Vera - at least by sight. She is there daily - at least twice a day in winter and three times or more in summer - walking her dog, Nicky, a brilliantly white Maltese. Impossible to calculate how many circuits she must have

done as she's lived in or near the Fields for over 74 years.

Born in Cloudesley Road, she moved from Barnsbury to 21 Highbury Terrace with her family when she was eight. They had the first floor and, to her delight, a few years later her aunt and cousins took the top floor. It was, she remembers, a very happy family house. The Fields then became both her playground and her route to wherever she wanted to go.

School was, first, Drayton Park and then Shelburne, closed in the 70's, later used by the Sixth Form Centre and now being converted into smart flats behind Waitrose. Leaving school at 14, her first job was with SCR, the Society for Cultural Relations with Russia, where, she says, she received her real education. There were only three of them; and Vera was the gopher, doing anything and everything and at 10 shillings a week - a good wage in those days - she was not only educated but radicalised. Lying about her age - you had to be 17 and she was only 15 - she joined the Labour League of Youth and spent a fair bit of her spare time in politics - lobbying at the House of Commons, going on marches: against the war, for Arms for Spain, May Day.

But it was not all agitation. Through the Labour Party Vera met her husband, Jim, who had no interest in politics but being a good table tennis player had been persuaded to join, so that East Party's team would have a better chance against South, West and Central.

Then came the war. She was just seventeen and.... Well,



VERA AND HER NEIGHBOURS PROTESTING ON THE FIELDS

there was a war on and who knew what would happen? Vera married in the Registry Office on the corner of Barnsbury Street and Liverpool Road, now also turned into flats. In the middle of the ceremony there was an air-raid warning, the office was closed and they were all tipped out on the street, fortunately only a short interruption.

Another very personal war-time memory was the day in 1944 when her mother, coming home from work in the Euston Road, just missed the No 30 bus, caught a 73, and changed at the Angel. As they reached the top of Upper Street there was a crash, the bus driver slowed down; the end of Compton Terrace had been bombed and everyone on the No 30 bus in front had been killed.

After the war Vera and Jim moved to Aberdeen Road where they brought up their three children. However, one day in 1966 Vera spotted a 'To Let' sign on a house in Highbury Place. Determined to move back to the Fields she persuaded Jim that they could manage in a one-bedroom flat. There Vera has lived for the last 38 years.

So how different is Highbury and the Fields from those early days? Shopping was mainly 'in the village' - the Barn. Meat was bought from Godfrey's (probably Chris's grandfather). The Post Office was where it is now, but there was also a fishmonger's, a nursery selling flowers, a haberdasher's, a tobacconist's, a chemist, a sweet shop and a high class pastry - cook's, selling delicious cream cakes. There was also a urinal for the bus drivers in the then road between the greengrocer and the pub. There were also shops in Highbury Place - a department store in Nos 18-20, a tobacconist on the corner of Calabria Road and, near the bottom, The Seven Steps Cafe.

Recreation on the Fields was less organised. There were no swings or playground but there was the wonderful open-air pool in which, in summer, Vera often swam, before or after work - along with the plane leaves. There was a band-stand with rousing concerts on the bottom field; and, when that rotted, another took its place in what now houses the 2 O'Clock Club. At first there was only one tennis court, then the netball pitch, then the football pitch and then more tennis courts - and people started to ask if there were going to be any fields left.

And, of course, there was the Arsenal to which she went with her brother for 6d (or 2½p). She remembers how the children were handed down in the stands by the grown-ups so that they could stand in the front. As a life-long Arsenal supporter Nicky, the dog, can be seen sporting a red bow whenever there's a victory parade.

In those early days there were few organised events; but from the late 60's there was the best bonfire in London on November 5 - sadly discontinued when it grew too popular. In the 80's the Council started to let the Fields to commercial organisations and one September day in 1990 locals were startled to see major excavations of the big field - to sink iron foundations to stage a Waterboys concert. Protests were made, the work temporarily stopped but when it recommenced some people lay down in front of the JCB. Vera, who had been rallying friends to join in, calmly lay down with

(Continued on page 4)



THE RISK - A MAJOR FIRE AT CITY UNIVERSITY IN 2001

FIRE FIGHTERS SEEK YOUR HELP!

The Fire Brigades Union for Islington wants residents and businesses to respond to the consultation on the Draft London Safety Plan, to object to two fire engines being cut from Islington - one from Upper Street and another from Rosebery Avenue. The deadline is Monday 7th February.

The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority suggests in its Draft London Safety Plan: "Changes to improve the overall standard of emergency response involve moving 10 fire engines to stations where they can make the most difference. The result would be that, on average, people in the capital will get a second fire engine faster than before. The fire engines will move from Acton, Bethnal Green, Clerkenwell, Dockhead, Euston, Greenwich, Islington, Kensington, Knightsbridge, and Westminster fire stations to Addington, Chingford, Finchley, Heston, Hillingdon, Leyton, Northolt, Sidcup, Sutton and Walthamstow fire stations."

Neale Williams, representing the Fire Brigades Union for Islington, Holloway, Hornsey and Clerkenwell says "The London Fire Brigade admits that these cuts will lengthen the time it will take for lifesaving firefighters to reach emergencies in our borough. Islington has the third highest number of residential fires in London."

Post letter or email by **7th February**:

LFEP, Your Views, FREEPOST SE 1956, London, SE1 7BR

Email: yourviews@london-fire.gov.uk

www.london-fire.gov.uk - to see the Draft Plan

www.citizenspace.co.uk/consultations/2004 - to respond online



MEMO.....

HCA Annual General Meeting and Party fixed for Saturday 16th April... invitations to follow.

(Continued from page 3)

the others - and, of course, her dog. Although by then 67, (two years retired from the civil service with an MBE for her services), she had not forgotten her youthful protests.

Many and delightful as are Vera's memories, what her friends and acquaintances most appreciate is her cheerfulness, interest in both world events and how the grand-children are getting on - and always her willingness to help others. Over the years she has minded most of her neighbours' cats, and held people's keys, so that when they forgot or lost them, they knew they could always find Vera somewhere on the Fields to let them in. ▣

Yoga Classes

Sarah Mackintosh teaches Yoga for all - Men, women and children equally welcome. £5 each. Just turn up, wear loose clothes. Mats provided. Thursdays 6.00pm - 7.30pm & 7.40pm - 9.10pm. Ecology Centre, 191 Drayton Park. (Gillespie Rd end)

Ecology Centre Tel: 7354 5162



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MWH advises on needs of Muslim pupils

In conjunction with CEA and SACRE, **Muslim Welfare House** has published a useful booklet 'Understanding the needs of Muslim pupils', providing guidance for schools, teachers and local authorities. Topics covered include the following: issues around curriculum, dress code, diet, collective worship, Friday prayers, religious holidays and 'involving Muslim parents'. For more information or to obtain a copy, please contact **7263 3071** or email info@mwht.org.uk

Where do you like to eat?

We all have our favourite haunts, whether smart restaurants, snack bars or 'greasy spoons'. HCA wants to build up a database of the best local eateries on our website - and the newsletter editors are keen for more reviews! Why not write a review for members (150-300 words) for inclusion on the website? A prize of a bottle of olive oil or of wine awaits anyone whose contribution is selected for the newsletter.

See bottom of page 6 for submission details.

St Valentine's Dinner and Dance!

Highbury Roundhouse
Friday 11th February 7.30pm – 10.30pm

Tickets include supper with music.

Dancing and more music after dinner.

Wine/drinks supplied at paying bar.

Ring Victoria or Bill on 7354 0397

for tickets @ £15 each.

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

HCA interviews Sally Bradshaw, professional classical soprano, who has made a name for versatility. Invited to perform many starring roles in opera she has travelled worldwide, sought after for recording and performing leading roles at many famous venues and festivals, including the Halle, Potsdam, Innsbruck and Aix-en-Provence festivals and the International Haydn Festival at Eisenstadt. She performs in contemporary music, and the pop world too. She is the soloist on Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells II. She is well regarded for her writing and acting skills and has also appeared in cabaret. Sally Bradshaw helped to found the group 'Words and Music' which stages readings by distinguished actors, with suitable accompanying music, which tours the UK. She finds time to run masterclasses in California, a summer school in south west France and teaches regularly at Fitzwilliam College in Cambridge. Another interest is writing about food for the Evening Standard and other publications. Sally has lived in Highbury for just over twenty years.

HCA - Why is Highbury a good place for you to live?

Sally - I live close to the shops at Highbury Barn 'Village' – and have enjoyed watching the street change over the years. We have a lot of 'class acts' now. La Fromagerie and Iznik's are relatively recent arrivals. I mention these in particular because, in my role as a Food Critic, I really enjoyed writing about them when they first opened. I'd say virtually all the shops are of high quality and know their customers; and it is wonderful to live close enough to use them every day. The railway station at Finsbury Park is also perfect for getting to Cambridge to teach and it's a short walk to Highbury & Islington underground. And of course London is considered the music capital of the world.

HCA - When did you know you would be a professional singer?

Sally - People told me I ought to be a professional singer when I was still at school and again at College but I was unsure, knowing what an insecure life it was. After reading English at Cambridge I decided to audition for a place at the Guildhall School

of Music and Drama, although I really was in two minds about it! However, they insisted I study there and that was it – I joined an opera company after graduating and toured Europe performing in many wonderful parts. My career has gone on from there. I do feel very lucky because it is so fulfilling and I have utter freedom. The insecurity remains, however. One only feels as good as one's last performance and I know other performers feel the same, at any level of achievement! The freedom comes from not being tied to early rising and working 9-5, which I swore I would never do. I suppose the hours suit my temperament - I'm best working in the afternoons and evenings.

HCA – What have you been working on recently?

Sally – I've just finished performing with John Julius Norwich in the Christmas concerts 'A Thousand Years of Christmas' in another 'Words and Music' production. Last Spring I was thrilled to make a recording of Ancient Greek Songs for EMI to coincide with the Athens Olympics. It was fascinating work - really unusual. The compositions were taken off ancient stone inscriptions! I also recorded a cantata about fairy stories with music composed for me by Judith Weir. Performing with The Pet Shop Boys last November, to an audience of 7,000 at Wembley Arena for The Prince's Trust, was a truly memorable event.

HCA – What is next?

Sally – Well, I'm recovering from jet lag today! Next I suppose is our Valentine's Day Show "Love and the English" for 'Words and Music' again - it is with Edward de Souza and is at Loseley Park near Guildford on 19th February. I'm also going to be involved in some more Baroque operas – Monteverdi's Orpheus for one. ▣

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SALLY BRADSHAW

Jumping on the Bandwagon?and getting it wrong!

HCA welcomes the news that the Green Party, Islington Transport Aware and Islington Society accept that local shops should be supported [witness their LBI funded poster urging us to use our shops - but only if we cycle, walk, use the tube or bus]. But consider this - the shops would not need helpful posters if this self-same transport lobby had not supported LBI's drive to prevent car-driving customers stopping for short periods in the main road, despite the view that staggered parking was possible. The parking provision is so mysterious and meagre that LBI has even produced a 'Where to Park while shopping at Highbury Barn' leaflet, presumably for shopkeepers to hurl after motorists as they pass by. What the cycling and public transport lobby does not acknowledge in their poster, is that car-driving customers are necessary to the existence of many local shopping parades. Of course, dangerous and inconsiderate blocking of buses and emergency vehicles at the Barn was wrong and had to be stopped. But the answer was not to remove all parking from Highbury Park, but to allow temporarily parked cars to slow the traffic, without causing blockages, so the Barn could remain a vibrant, busy place sustained by the 20-30% of trade offered by passing motorists.

On a positive note - LBI's short-sighted and thuggish parking policy hit the national TV networks on Channel 4 on 22nd January with Peter Osborne's exposé of how pettifoggery bureaucracy has gone mad in this city. Maybe if more people make a fuss our shops will be saved before it is too late and everyone has to trek to distant superstores. ■

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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 or for website to: HC News, 83 Highbury Hill N5 1SX or email hcnews@hotmail.com

Visit www.highburycommunity.org

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