

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 23 May 2001

OPEN GARDENS SCHEME IS NO WASH-OUT

By Robin Hull

The last Sunday in April was an opportunity to visit seven of the gardens in Malvern Terrace, N1, as part of the National Gardens Scheme.

From the end of February to the end of October there are Open Days to visit private gardens across London, mostly at weekends, offering an enormous choice of size and types of garden to investigate how gardening enthusiasts have set about the challenge of developing their space. It's a chance to get new ideas for situations such as planting in shade, on a slope, in a restricted space or for a long and narrow garden.

Malvern Terrace which dates from 1839 is fortunate to have a row of



THE GARDEN OF 8 MALVERN TERRACE.



ANN LE FANU SHOWS HCA VISITORS AROUND HER GARDEN.

south-facing gardens. Unusually for London, these are in front of the houses; and they are planted in a cottage style appropriate to their scale.

The rain stopped for us to view them and to buy from the stall offering Victorian plants. We met Ann Le Fanu, who talked to us about how she planted to create different groups of colours in different areas, from the whites and yellows close to the house to the purples and blues by the quiet street which serves the houses. She re-plants her terracotta pots several times to keep the colours and textures vibrant throughout the year.

Some garden owners we met were

a little disappointed that this year the weather has kept the plants back and the expected flowering was only just coming through. But to the visitors it was a delight. Everything looked very lush and healthy and there was more than enough in flower to set off the many shapes, textures and colours of the foliage.

The National Gardens Scheme produces a 50p booklet, "London Gardens Guide 2001", available at most garden centres. It lists all the gardens open to the public and their dates. There is usually a small admission charge which goes to charity. Last year the scheme raised over £1.8 million. The NGS can be contacted on 01483 211535 ■

HIGHBURY'S FIRST BANKER

By Roy Hidson

In the early years of the nineteenth century when Highbury Place was new and fashionable, a carriage could be seen being driven toward number 38, outside of which it halted. Out would step a man described by contemporary observers as 'Of the middle stature, somewhat athletic in form, of pleasing features and a cheerful aspect'. The man in question was Abraham Newland, Chief Cashier of the Bank of England.

He only occasionally visited his Highbury home, for during his twenty-five years as Chief Cashier, he never once slept outside his apartments in the Bank. Newland was a bachelor and a family friend named Cornthwaite acted as his housekeeper. He would visit her at Highbury to take tea, walk as far as Highbury Barn and then take his carriage back to the Bank.

He was born in the Parish of St. Mary, Overie, Southwark in 1730. His father was William Newland a baker, who came from Buckinghamshire, was married twice, and was the father of twenty-five children. In later years Abraham proved a generous benefactor to his numerous siblings. He entered the Bank of England as a clerk and was so conscientious in his duties he rose through the grades until he became Chief Cashier in 1782.

At this time both the Bank and the country were going through difficult times. By 1797 the Bank had stopped exchanging notes for gold; and money was needed to finance the war against Revolutionary France. The British fleet had mutinied and there was threat of a French invasion of Ireland. By now Newland had unrivalled knowledge of the business of the Bank and of Britain's finances. This same year saw the introduction of banknotes bearing Newland's signature.

It is said that the new notes reduced highway robbery, for unlike coins they could be identified by their serial numbers.

The comedy value of this innovation was not lost upon Charles Dibdin, the manager of Sadler's Wells Theatre. He made it the subject of one of his celebrated comic songs.

*There ne'er was a name so bandied by fame,
Thro' air, thro' ocean, and thro' land,
As one that is wrote upon every bank note,
You all must know Abraham Newland.
Oh! Abraham Newland, Notified Abraham Newland!
I've heard people say, 'sham Abraham' you may,
But you mustn't sham Abraham Newland.*

*For Fashion or Arts should you seek foreign parts,
It matters not wherever you land,
Jew, Christian, or Greek the same language they speak,
That's the language of Abraham Newland.
Oh! Abraham Newland,
Wonderful Abraham Newland!
Tho' with compliments cramm'd,
You may die and be d- n'd,
If you haven't an Abraham Newland.*



'Sham Abraham' was a contemporary term to mean one who avoided work by feigning illness or distress. Newland's economy and industry as well as his financial acumen amassed for him a sizeable fortune, most of which went to his housekeeper. Not without humour, Newland even composed his epitaph, which was not used.

*Beneath this stone old Abraham lies;
Nobody laughs, and nobody cries,
Where he is gone, and how he fares,
No one knows and, no one cares.*

Despite Newland's wealth and the regard he had earned at the Bank, his last years were sad. He had befriended an employee at the Bank named Robert Aslett. Some people believed him to have been Newland's natural son.

Aslett proved dishonest and was arrested for 'feloniously secreting and embezzling Exchequer Bills to the amount of several thousand pounds belonging to the Governor and Company of the Bank'. Newland had the distressing experience of having to give evidence against Aslett in court. At the time of Newland's death, Aslett was still awaiting his fate in Newgate prison. Newland died at Highbury on 21st of November 1807 and was buried in what is now Southwark Cathedral in the Bishop's vault by the side of his father and sister. However, in spite of the large sum left to her, his housekeeper only erected a very modest wall tablet to Newland in the cathedral.

In 1993, one of Newland's banknotes was auctioned at Christie's and realised the sum of £52,000. ▣

Community Centre seeks manager

The renovation works at Elizabeth House are nearing completion, and the trustees are looking now for a Centre Manager to run the project when it opens in September.

Trustee, Robert Scott, is keen to find someone with a wide range of skills.

"Ideally, we are looking for a generalist" he explained. "We need a good business manager, and someone who can reach out to the wide variety of kids and adults who will be using the Centre. Like all charities these days, we need to be business-like - so fund-raising and promoting the Centre will be important. As well as the existing work with children, there will be lots of educational courses for all ages, so computer skills and a teaching back-ground could come in handy too; but the main thing is energy and initiative. It should be fun, but it's no job for a clock-watcher."

If you think you might be the person for the job - or you know someone who might be interested, keep an eye out for ads in the Guardian and the local papers - or ring **Robert** on 7359 5731. ■

Islington Society seeks new members

The Islington Society was founded forty years ago to campaign for the retention of aspects of our built environment which are now taken for granted.

The case for reuse of old buildings, and good design of new ones is better understood now than it was then. So is the need for good public transport, and for conditions in which it makes more sense to use it than the private car.

Activities include awards for good design of new buildings and shop fronts, lectures, visits and tours for members and a newsletter three times a year

Membership is stronger in some areas than in others. The more representative of Islington the Society is, the more weight will be given to what it says.

The annual subscription rates are £8 per person or £10 for two or more at the same address. Please apply for membership to Adam Bower, Islington Society Treasurer, 12, Cloudesley Square, London, N1 0HT. ■

New service for victims of crime

For months, anyone wanting a word of advice, or to report a crime at Highbury Vale Police Station has been faced with locked doors and a broken telephone.

Now it has been decided, it will not open to the public again. According to the police, only 13 people a day used it when it was last open. Either Highbury people had little to report — or they thought it was not worth the effort.

Local Victim Support Schemes have found some community groups are less likely to report crimes than others, suggesting these groups are "suffering in silence". A new project in Finsbury Park aims to find out why so many people do not report crimes.

The Unreported Crime Project will listen in confidence to victims of crime, and offer advice and referral to other helping services. They will also be running free self-defence courses.

For further details, or to talk about a crime, ring **Sharon Smith** on 7281 4354 or 07951 422 907 from 9-5 Monday to Friday. ■

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

HCA interviews Sheila Murnane who runs Gathering Moss in the Blackstock Road with her partner, Moss Foley.

HCA - Why did you decide to buy a Shop here?

Sheila - It was pure chance. A friend ran a shop here, Kusmally, and was leaving. We wanted to rent and try it for a year but ended up buying the freehold of the whole building. I had never run a shop before but I work only two days a week for RNID and wanted a shop selling the sorts of things I love in my home. Moss wanted an outlet for the furniture and other things he makes out of new or reclaimed wood.

HCA - When did you open your shop?

Sheila - April 1999. So we've been here 2 years now! It's open 2 days a week - on Saturday and Sunday. Moss has spent the last year digging out and flooring the basement and the stairs are now built. Hopefully, in 6 weeks that bit of the shop will be open and we'll be open from Wednesday through to Sunday.



SHEILA WITH HER WARES

HCA - What do you do to keep the shop stocked?

Sheila - Most of the stuff is imported from India. Moss makes mirrors, tables and furniture to order. Most of the time I'm looking for new ideas and objects to buy and sell. I like to buy from individual craftsmen and designers and display and sell their work. I take a commission so it helps us as well as the artist. Elle Decoration and other design magazines are helpful - if I like an object I buy it in. The internet is a good source of ideas - I find out what is selling well.

HCA - What next?

Sheila - Moss and I want to display and sell more work by students and artists starting out on their careers, particularly more ceramics and paintings. Moss wants to teach. We are talking to Haringey Council about a scheme for Moss to train 14 -16 year olds. So in some ways the shop is not truly representative of what we eventually want to do. Right now we want to stay here for another 3-5 years!

Gathering Moss 193 Blackstock Road, N5 Tel: 7354 3044 Open Saturday and Sunday from 11 am. ■

Letters from.....

John Turney

Applause and congratulations! Both to Elizabeth Smith and the editor, for publishing the most interesting article on Captain Huddart.

I hope that there may be many more such well-informed articles on local history - unless, of course, this one is an April-Fools' joke!

Joke or not, a Local Community Newsletter should publish such items in order to stimulate local interest and even pride - local problems may be very relevant, but sometimes boring to read when dragged out (inevitably) to the extent of the Arsenal Saga, for example. ▣

from.....

Laurence Gerlis

There were seven-hour traffic jams in and out of Cardiff on 25th February for the Worthington Cup Final.

Only half the expected crowd of 72,000 came by coaches and trains, the other half choosing to use private cars. This is the spirit of our times. A woman from Birmingham was quoted on Radio 4 saying, "We just got as close to the stadium as we could, dumped the car and ran."

This type of chaos will paralyse B-lington, Highbury and Holloway for all events and home matches if Arsenal FC's plans go ahead. We should be able to learn from other people's mistakes. ▣

& a poem by.....

Alison Trower

Parting Ways At The Tube

It's always in the eyes. They are cavepainted.
Strange, distorted animals, elongated hunts;
Triumph, fear, in reds and browns. I put my
Arm around his waist, he puts his about my
Shoulder. We could have been helping each other,
Limp sailors making it up shore from the
Storm-wrecked rib cage of a passage. But we
Weren't, we were saying goodbye after another
Evening in the pub; drunk on each other's
Secrecy, unmentioned and obvious. Escalators
Descend us through the crust of the Earth and
Down into the mantle where the red glows upon
Our faces like a desertcamp fire and the
Anticipation of one or other to speak first.
There are two stories to be told here, or perhaps
They are more similar than we pretend.
Perhaps they are the arms of only one tale
Holding its spear, aimed, ready to kill a
Creature with its detail, its shocking plot that
Makes our paths overlap as waves' faces smashed
Up against rock become one destruction upon
Another, one explosion of wet that leaps out
In all directions like the panic of a herd.
It's been nice seeing you, I say, having merely
Seen him from afar, across the savannah of
A table with only two glasses upon it.
The injured beast still grazes quietly between
Us. I'm waiting for the signal. Then I will
Make my move. ▣

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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.