

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

www.highburycommunity.org

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THE BRIGHTER WAY TO PAINT By Antonia Fenwick

There is a lot of rather superficial literature on green issues, much of it about social and economic policies, or general gloom about the future of the planet. Many people in the building industry avoid using the term 'green' altogether, choosing terms such as 'environmentally friendly buildings' or 'sustainable development'; but what can these terms mean in relation to our homes or immediate environment?

We can make a difference within our own surroundings, by being aware of a few basic facts about decorating, general household maintenance and particularly the materials used.

We can spend up to 80% of our lives inside buildings, yet few people realise that our indoor environment can be up to 10 times more polluted than outdoors. We may be surrounded by a complex mixture of toxic emissions from all types of chemical products that have been used in our homes and workplaces, including paints. Oil, the basis of the petrochemical industry, is a diminishing and non-renewable resource, and the production of synthetic paint relies on it. The energy production of 1 tonne of paint can sometimes produce 10 – 30 tonnes of toxic waste. What happens to that toxic waste? Cases of cancer in decorators are up to 40% higher than within other trades, which would suggest that paint pollution within our homes is not only toxic but carcinogenic as well.

Natural and traditional paints, however, are made largely from renewable raw materials such as plant oils, clays, chalk, lime etc. They are produced using 'soft technology' which is not reliant on the petrochemical industry, is less wasteful, uses much less energy, and is less polluting. All paint was once made naturally, and traditional paints and finishes are generally easy to make, employ few ingredients and can be applied using simple techniques. They also have pleasant smells instead of noxious ones.

We are commonly led to believe that 'environmentally friendly' will automatically mean 'expensive' and hard to source, but the paints I use compare well in price to makes such as Sanderson, Farrow and Ball and Dulux. The colours available are soft, chalky and generally have a natural and earthy feel; the more intense the colour, the more pigment required, which will reflect in the price.

The Islington Ecology Centre set in Gillespie Park, is not only part of a beautiful local green space, and nature reserve. It is also an educational centre offering courses to schools, colleges and to the general public on ecology, traditional land management, holistic horticulture, and many other subjects. It is managed and maintained in a sustainable way, the

ecosystem is rigorously observed, and has as a result managed to lure back some of the native birds, plants and animals which have been lost to Islington over the decades.

We painted the building two years ago, using materials that are totally sustainable in their production and manufacture. On the exterior we used a self-priming and undercoating plant-oil based paint, and parts of the interior were re-decorated with a natural emulsion. All these materials were supplied by *Construction Resources*, the largest green building suppliers, and sustainable building educational centre, in London.



THE ECOLOGY CENTRE

Contrary to popular belief there are many makes and suppliers of natural paint, and much literature on green building. *The Green Building Handbook*, by Tom Woolley and others (E & FN Spon) and the *Natural Paint Book* by Lynn Edwards and Julia Lawless (Kyle Cathie), are great reference books and good places to start learning about green building and natural paint. ▣

Antonia Fenwick runs Antz Decorating and will be happy to help with any queries regarding this subject or with decorating and renovation in general.

Tel: 07970 011 803 email: toto@toto82.fsnet.co.uk

HCA annual party and AGM

Saturday 16 April at 7.15pm in Christ Church

Speaker – Peter Powell, local historian and Dickens expert
Raffle in aid of 'Saving Faces'
Party, food, wine - all members and their families welcome!
Members – Expect your invitation shortly!

Gentrifying Highbury Stadium to take 4 years

Arsenal has recently revealed the real plans for converting Highbury Stadium to residential use. Previous plans were for outline consent only on much of the site, so it was always likely that there would be substantial revisions to increase density and profitability.

So it proves. Before there were to be 557 flats; now there are to be 711. Before there were to be a few houses and a number of larger, family flats. Now there are to be yet more small units instead. Before there were 10 wheelchair units, now there are 6. Originally there was to have been 25% affordable housing, including social rented. Now the rented accommodation has been replaced by 'shared-equity' housing, available only to the better-off.

Much of this was foreseeable, given the Council's failure to pin down the developer on most of the important points, including the location and tenure of the affordable homes within the overall scheme.

What does come as an unwelcome surprise is the proposal to extend the time-scale for building from 30 months to four years. The development is scheduled to start when the site is vacated next year, but the East Stand conversion is now not expected to be completed until 2010. If approved, this means four years of construction misery instead of two and a half.

Details of this major scheme will be posted on the Council website and will also be available in the Central Library shortly. A decision is expected, following consultation, some time in the summer. ▣

AFC Northern Bridge Building enlarged

In keeping with the policy of enlarging everything in its scheme, Arsenal proposes to increase the height and size of the Northern Bridge Building in Drayton Park from two storeys to five. It will now be taller than the new housing next to it; and it will contain more commercial uses as well as the Arsenal administrative offices. ▣

AFC Super Casino on London Assembly Agenda

On March 1st the London Assembly Planning Committee discussed the pros and cons of Super Casinos as part of its scrutiny of the potential impact of new casinos in London. The Government's Gambling Bill has been put on hold, but its core is the relaxation of rules which would govern the number, size and location of new casinos across the UK. The Committee was aware of proposals in the pipeline for regional casinos at 8 sites, one being Arsenal Stadium. A regional casino is defined as one with a minimum customer area of 5,000 sq metres, with up to 1,250 gaming machines. GLA members present appeared sceptical of some of the wilder claims of the gambling promoters, particularly that Super Casinos 'regenerated' areas. The Committee is due to make recommendations to the Mayor and to the Government by the end of July 2005. The webcast of the meeting is on www.london.gov.uk ▣

HCA lends support to Islington Guardians

Essex Road traders have started a campaign to preserve their businesses by attacking the Council's more extreme anti-car measures. An excellent website with news items, views and statements from various community and other groups, including HCA, is at www.islingtonguardians.com ▣

St George's Day Concert

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Piano - Neil Cloake

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Discovering dyslexia

By Alison Carmichael

All I knew about dyslexia was that people who had it found spelling hard, and sometimes reading too. It wasn't until my teenage niece was told last year, by her excellent new secondary school, that it would be helpful for her to have support from a tutor for dyslexia, special software programmes and more time in exams, that I wanted to know more. I found that my niece's traits – creativity, a vivid imagination, a voracious delight in reading but also difficulty in organisation and remembering or understanding instructions, are often found in people with dyslexia. I learnt that many people with dyslexia have higher than normal intelligence and, if not suppressed by negative feedback, can have extraordinary creative abilities. I also learned there is a wide spectrum of experience and no two people with dyslexia have the same difficulties or talents.

Mikaela Davies, now 23 and working as a solicitor's clerk, wrote a heart-rending poem at the age of ten, describing her feelings on being called '*Stupid! Stupid! Dumbo! Thicker! Slow-coach!*' by her classmates. This can be the experience of undiagnosed, severely dyslexic primary school children, even in 2005. This is despite all the publicity about dyslexia and the related condition dyspraxia. "*My mother was told I had 'social difficulties', which she couldn't believe, and she tried enormously hard to get the teachers to help me and realise that I was not simply being 'difficult'. I couldn't read until I was 9 and I did not fit in with the other kids, so I was pretty unhappy.*" When an educational psychologist finally diagnosed Mikaela as dyslexic, it was a huge relief to know the cause of her difficulties. Support came from regular specialist tutoring and she was given a card to hand to supply-teachers, explaining how to help her: *make sure instructions for the task are understood : remember that Mikaela finds writing tasks very difficult.*

The then newly formed Islington Dyslexia Support Group, run by Bob Dowd, meant Mikaela met others in the same situation. Many were as creative and intelligent as she is, but did not enjoy school. Bob, himself dyslexic, runs a safe space for children (and adults) to follow specially designed computer programmes which give them confidence to recognise words, learn keyboard skills, practice processing information and learn to concentrate for longer periods. It's a charity run by volunteers, based in Hargrave Park School, Archway. On Saturdays, from 10am to 3pm, about 10 children of varying ages work quietly at the computer stations getting gentle encouragement from Bob.

The effort needed to concentrate is enormous, much greater than that needed by people without dyslexia. Confusion and panic can often set in. Bob knows that and can spot a child who needs a calming voice to help him or her continue. "*The children respond very well to a supportive, uncritical environment. I believe that we should be using specialist software like this throughout the schools – not just for dyslexics but also to help any*

pupil who has gaps in their understanding, for whatever reason." Bob does not believe that people 'overcome' dyslexia: "*Richard Branson just pays people to do the work he can't do himself! We are nature's problem solvers. We have to use different strategies to avoid being found out or to achieve the task.*"

Why do some people with dyslexia read books so fast? Mikaela explains that she has to skim read the page because the words jump around and can make her feel dizzy if she reads slowly. Also she simply can't recognise many of the words and so skips them. This is not such a problem now she is an adult since she employs lots of strategies to remember how to pronounce, spell or write a word. "*I love reading and it is easier than writing, although I enjoy creative writing. Luckily most people at work seem to be able to read my transcripts of court proceedings! It is hard to explain but I give colours and pictures to words. I give the months of the year colours to help me remember the word – and I find a number by the 'position' I have given it in my mind's eye. It all happens at the speed of lightening. Trouble comes when I see a word I haven't used before – I can't just pronounce it by looking at how it is spelt like you can – so I need to memorize the shape and spelling of new words.*" Mikaela remembers with a smile how she made the class laugh because she had written in her Shakespeare essay about "The Duck of Milan." "*That was ok because I had friends by then and it was very funny!*"

A book by Ron Davies "The Gift of Dyslexia" strikes some chords with Mikaela when he talks about the benefit of giving a word a 'picture' and emphasises that creativity is a very significant talent in dyslexics, because they can think and perceive multi-dimensionally, using all the senses. I remember being concerned years ago when I took my niece to the Little Angel Theatre when she was nearly 6. She seemed rather too scared by the beautifully produced puppet Fairy Story, involving a Green Monster. Her younger sister, at only 3 ½, sat riveted and enthralled while she could hardly bear to watch the moments the Green Monster threatened to eat the Princess. Learning now that she probably was perceiving her thoughts as reality, I feel even more guilty.

People with dyspraxia share some elements of dyslexia and some dyslexics also find hand-eye co-ordination difficult. A young neighbour of mine, now in his final year at University, certainly found school hard and finds he prefers to acknowledge his dyspraxia, but also does not let it interfere with his life. "*I don't like to blame things that go wrong for me on my dyspraxia – after all everyone has something different about them.*" Funny memories remain of certain school projects. "*Two quotes from projects about Arsenal still make my mother laugh: 'The congestion on match days is terrible because people insist on bringing their cats to the game...!' and one where I wrote AFC hadn't done much for the community, 'except for organising bowls for the over 60s!'*" ■

Mikaela's poem is on www.highburycommunity.org

Islington Dyslexia Support Group Helpline: Dr Jill McKeown 020 7609 7515 or Bob Dowd (evenings) plus information on week-day and Saturday classes 07968 334230

Highbury Fields were not like this !

By Tony Miller

You may recall that, last autumn, I reported to HC News that my wife, Val, and I were preparing to embark upon an arduous sponsored trek in the Andes, to raise money for Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. You may have thought we were barmy. You may be wondering if we survived.

Well this should reassure you that we did – just.

The days that we spent trudging along the Inca Trail, climbing endless steps, not turning to admire the view, lest we lose our footing and hurtle several hundred feet to the valley below, ended in..... well, they ended.

And those days that we spent strolling around Highbury Fields, thinking that these practice walks would prepare us for the event – well, they didn't.

Reality struck about half an hour after we were dropped off at the KM88, the start of the trail. We had been told that if we were going to suffer from altitude sickness (shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness) this would be the time when it would manifest itself. "I'm feeling fine", said one of the younger, fitter members of the party. Whereupon, blood started pouring from her nose. But, game girl, she got up and carried on.

The first night under canvas produced a hazard that we had not been warned about. Being of a certain age, it is sometimes necessary to interrupt one's slumbers for a call, the nature of which can only be conducted outside the tent. For this purpose we had equipped ourselves with torches, which we strapped to our heads. It's the only way to tackle the pitch dark of the Peruvian night and still have two hands free. But what we hadn't reckoned with was that most of the winged insect life of the Amazon Basin would home in on this little beacon and crash land on our faces.

The second day gave us our greatest challenge, a relentless climb to 4200 metres and Dead Woman's Pass. We were assured that this name related only to the geographical features, which resembled a recumbent female form. But I'm not convinced. This is the height of Everest Base Camp. It is also the height at which Peruvian domestic airplanes fly, though luckily we weren't on the flight path. Having reached this point of no return, one woman in our party had to be loaded on to a stretcher. Not dead, but giving a passable imitation.

The Incas were the most amazing masons. Typically, they didn't cut the trail into the incline of the mountainside. They built a retaining wall, filled it in and constructed a winding staircase around the mountain. Often we faced a sheer rise on one side of the trail and a sheer drop on the other. So we didn't dare try to admire the construction work. If you could see what you were standing on, you had already fallen off it.

The final morning took us to the Sun Gate, high above the citadel of Machu Picchu. I don't think the Incas encouraged casual visitors to drop in. To reach this vantage point, we had to ascend a crippling flight of two foot high stone steps. But... then... there was the huge relief of seeing our destination laid out below us. I'm not ashamed to say that it brought a tear to the eye. As we made our descent a few

American tourists, who had arrived by train (well, they would), stood to one side of the trail and applauded us. That felt pretty good.

The trip was considerably tougher than we had anticipated. In the darkest moments we had to keep reminding ourselves that we were there for a purpose. There were sixteen members of our group and all of them had some personal reason for being committed to the cause. We were exhausted but it was worth it.

So thank you to all those members of HCA and friends around Highbury who supported our moment of madness or sponsored our efforts. Val and I raised over £11,000 for the GOSH Children's Charity. Would we do it again? Well, perhaps we would if we could. Could we do it again? Probably not. But if you see us pounding round Highbury Fields with a mad glint in our eyes..... ☐

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Coryn McGovern tending to Olivia and her half hour old calf.

This calf was born at Freightliner's Farm, Islington on the morning of 9th March, after a long night's calving. He is the second calf to be born in the last few weeks at the Farm. Coryn stayed in the Barn all night keeping watch over Olivia and

intervening when needed. He says he did manage some sleep! Yoav Alony, a Royal Veterinary College vet who gives his time for free said "I've come over on the staff's request to check all is well as it was a long and difficult calving. Everything is fine and Coryn and the other staff have done a brilliant job!"

Freightliner's Farm in Sheringham Road, N7 has many projects for children and adults to work on, as well as animals to see and gardens to tend and create. Ecological building projects like the Straw Bale and Oak Frame future Tea House and Sure Start Centre are fun to work on. The Cordwood Hut (pictured opposite) has walls of 8 inch logs and lime plaster

and will have a 'green roof' planted with Sedum.

If you'd like to know more, work as a volunteer on Saturdays and some weekdays, or simply visit this special City Farm ring Liz McAlister on 020 7609 0467 



The interior of the Cordwood Hut showing the ends of the logs

A Listing for Aubert Court? By Dan Oakey

Aubert Court and its grounds form one of Highbury's most distinctive sights, a rare example of post-war utopian social housing that has stood the test of time. As a resident of Aubert Court, I can vouch for the quality of the building, the graceful curve of the balconies, the many mature trees, the ingenious terracing of the different blocks. Then again, these are qualities that anyone can appreciate - you don't have to be a resident.

For a time last year, it looked as though Aubert Court was about to be thoroughly vandalised by Homes For Islington (HFI), the arms-length management body set up by the council to administer its housing stock. There were plans to replace the windows with hideous wide-framed modern windows that would have been completely out of keeping with the original design. And HFI wanted to tear down several of the graceful curved balconies and rebuild them with modern bricks (by some anonymous sub-contractor).

Tenants and residents lobbied hard and got a big helping hand from HCA. We think it worked. The window frames are a lot narrower now and the original balconies will be preserved. We should see the quality of the work very soon, as the first phase of the year-long works is due to begin at the end of March.

However, there are three areas where we still need to watch the council and HFI very closely.


Firstly, Islington Council is about to apply for planning permission to demolish Aubert Court's community centre and replace it with a modern building with around 24 flats stuck on top. Many residents are fiercely opposed to this because we want to keep the whole sweep of the building intact. We also have worries about extreme housing density (especially now that AFC plans to build 711 units on Highbury Stadium, not the original 557).

Secondly, despite scaffolding the building for a year, there is no guarantee that HFI will clean the brickwork properly or address the cause of the staining - namely incessant, faulty overflow pipes.

Thirdly, there is a new threat from Arsenal regarding the trees on the grounds of Aubert Court. AFC has submitted a revised planning application that moves the southernmost block of new flats 5 metres closer to the edge of Aubert Court. Residents think that the roots of 10 trees could be damaged, perhaps destroyed. We cannot request to have the trees officially protected

because it is Islington Council that both owns the land and issues protection orders; and its policy is not to protect its own trees on the grounds that we can trust it not to damage them.

To address these concerns properly, I believe that Aubert Court should be listed. It should not be allowed to moulder away or be chopped up at the convenience of the council. The contrast between the neglect of Aubert Court and Islington Town Hall (both designed by EP Monson) could not be clearer. I cannot think of a more striking tall housing block in Islington. The quality and attention to detail are amazing. Many flats still have the original kitchens, and some residents have refused replacement kitchens because they doubt a modern one could improve on what they have.

The problem, I do not know the best way to go about asking for Aubert Court to be listed. If any readers have suggestions or advice or would like to add their voice to the calls for Aubert Court to be listed, please get in touch. 

Email: dan.oakey@yahoo.com or ring HCA on 7359 5731

See colour pictures illustrating this and other articles on our website: www.highburycommunity.org

Trials of the cab trade by 'Harassed of Highbury'

It is rumoured that Islington Council is attempting to make its parking procedures more user-friendly. This was not evident when I recently ordered a mini-cab from a local firm. I emerged from the house to find an enraged cab driver pushing an equally agitated parking attendant into the hedge.

It appeared that the driver had been waiting in his car for a couple of minutes with the engine running. As Highbury Hill is a wide street, his double parking outside the house caused no obstruction. At one point he had pulled the car forward a foot or two – and then spotted the attendant keying the cab details into his hand-held computer.

Commotion ensued. The attendant claimed that 1) the driver was trying to run him over, and 2) that the cab should have parked in a space down the hill on the opposite side of the road. The driver insisted (correctly) that the warden should have been standing by the car before taking details. How was he to collect his customers if he couldn't stop outside their house?

For the driver, this was the latest in a string of alleged offences, the previous penalty incurred when he had drawn up to consult the A-Z. The attendant was no doubt trying to meet the targets imposed by NCP, which runs parking control on behalf of the council.

Restrictions are necessary, but should be making life easier for local residents and businesses, not increasing stress. Lovely Rita, meter maid, where are you now?

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Highbury Community Association

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