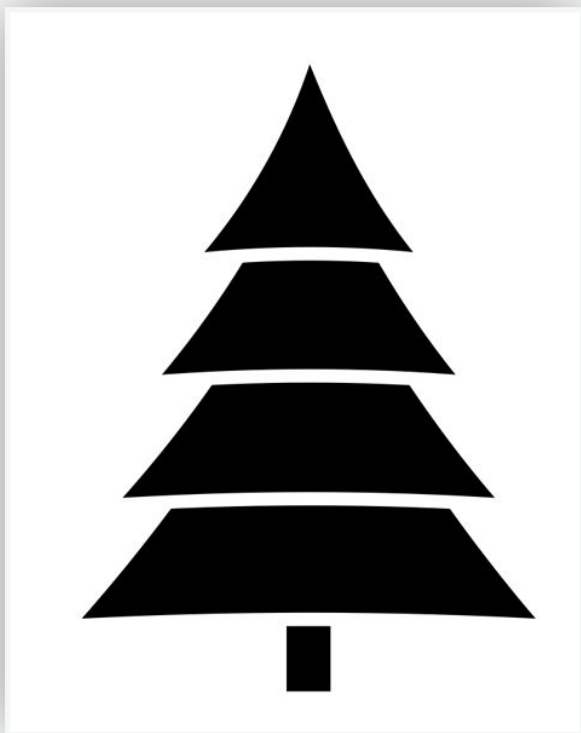


## MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR MEMBERS



**2022 has been a wonderful 50th anniversary year. The highlight was the hugely successful Summer History Festival with tours, talks and celebrations. The launch party was a great success as was the community picnic with live music in Myddelton Square.**

**With an eye on sustainability we have raised £11,000 to plant trees around our area.**

**Membership of the Amwell Society makes a good Christmas gift for a friend. Subscription is just £7.00 a year.**

**Go online and subscribe. Take a tour of our new website which was also launched in our 50th anniversary year.**

**Thank you to long-standing members for supporting the Society and thank you to our volunteer committee members who help throughout the year.**

**Trees are not just for Christmas** our Chair, Peadar Sionoid writes ...

In our 50th anniversary year, the committee agreed that we should celebrate and so we did with our immensely successful History Festival in June. All events were full. The Friday-night party for members was packed and the Sunday afternoon community picnic in Myddelton Square was a relaxing, friendly and welcoming affair with live music.

Not only did we have a good time in the summer but we also had an eye on sustainability and climate change as a way of marking our 50th year long-term. The Society has raised a staggering £11,000 towards tree planting so trees planted in our 50th year might be here in 2072, our 100th year. We have no tree specialists in the Society [any qualified person, please step forward] or knowledge of tree planting successfully in an urban setting. We have approached London Borough of Islington [LBI] in order to join the borough-wide planting programme. We want to work closely with LBI and plant trees where the committee and members have identified gaps in our streets.

We have been approved as a participant in LBI's Greening Together initiative but progress has been slow. Now we will identify species of trees, agree locations for saplings and make a maintenance plan. A much-anticipated meeting and walkabout with the committee members and the tree specialists from Islington Council is scheduled for December. We hope, therefore, to have concrete and positive news to report in the new year.

Alongside tree planting we have more wonderful news. At the beginning of 2022 the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration succeeded in obtaining full planning permission for their thrilling project to redevelop the New River Head site. The QBC will attract visitors to our area and that in turn will enable cafe's, shops and the community to thrive. Read more about this on the inside pages of the newsletter.

Also, we will soon see much needed remedial work carried out on the Grade I Listed Finsbury Health Centre in Pine Street which, we hope, will precede a complete restoration, ensuring the future of this celebrated building so that it can serve its original function as our community health centre and become a key World Heritage site. Although outside our catchment, the Society takes a keen interest in FHC.

We are delighted made some new appointments within the committee structure. One of these will be a person who will help us as events organiser. You can look forward to an enhanced programme of events in 2023 and beyond. In the meantime, best wishes to you and your families and friends for the holiday season.

# The Amwell Society. Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 50 years

## Our first President

Jane Wainwright, who has lived in Cumberland Gardens off Great Percy Street since 1970, was a founder member of the Society, the first secretary and later Treasurer. At our AGM in October, to celebrate our 50th year, we asked Jane if she would agree to be our first Honorary President and to everyone's great delight, she agreed.

*'We very much wanted to live around here. It was 1970. Almost every house needed total renovation. There were still a few bomb sites too. We saw a house in Great Percy Street but our solicitors advised against buying it. Then, one Sunday morning, we saw this house was for sale by auction. It had been empty for 10 years, so you can imagine how much we had to do - although the roof was in good condition. Many of the houses had been in multiple occupation for years and most needed care and attention. When we moved in, neighbours called on us to say hello and to invite us for meals. One neighbour, Averil Lysaght, a biologist and painter, was very kind as was Mollie Mackie, who had Sunday noon drinks parties. Stella Newton became a good friend as well. The area was neighbourly and with people from all kinds of backgrounds living together. That continues but it seems that people are not quite so neighbourly as they were.'*

*Until 1968 the Lloyd Baker Estate was managed personally by Olive Lloyd Baker. who visited each house every year. I didn't know Miss Lloyd Baker myself, but many tenants did. She was an old-fashioned grand lady-owner who kept a keen eye on her properties, her tenants and their moral behaviour. If tenants didn't meet her high standards, she might oblige them to move to accommodation she owned which was more affordable, lower down the hill and social pecking order. She was formal yet benign. In consequence of her social awareness, many of her houses needed money spending on them. Most people - even in 1970 - had no bathrooms which meant they used the public baths in Merlin Street.*

*The Society was the brainchild of David Humphries who lived with a director from Sadler's Wells, Dennis Arundell in Lloyd Square. The activists, at the beginning, were Carol Goddard, Norman King and Irvine Gray. They organised talks, trips and social events. Christopher Elrington, the first chairman, was so astute and aware of which battles needed to be fought to preserve the area.*

*I am so pleased to be the first President of the Society. There is no doubt that our area looks as it does to day because of its enthusiastic founders.*

## Sad news

We are very sorry to report that we lost, very prematurely, one of our excellent committee members, Andrew Mansfield. Andrew was a well-loved, helpful and friendly figure on Amwell Street. We send warm wishes to his widow, Patricia. In September, committee members attended a memorial mass for Andrew in Chelmsford, and learnt how popular Andrew was in his home town.

## Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration

... Lindsey Glen, Director of the QBC, writes...

After more than 70 years behind locked gates, the New River Head is set to become a place to enjoy illustration, local heritage and fresh green spaces. Permission for the QBC was confirmed in February and local architect, Tim Ronalds, is finalising designs.

More than 1,850 people attended our open days in September, enjoying a taste of what's to come. Visitors explored the derelict buildings, joined guided tours and shared their ideas for the future Centre. Installations by resident illustrators offered new ways into New River Head's stories. Sharpay Chenyuè Yuán's 25m canvas *'Lost Springs, Coming Spring'* mixed, observational drawings of past and present and Laura Copsey and Philip Crewe's fictional museum, *'New River Folk'*, displayed beautifully-crafted artefacts said to belong to a mole-catcher, water-carrier and well-owner whose lives were intertwined with the history of the New River. Their *'New River: Immersions'* included camera-less photography that captured the beauty of light through New River water. You can find the photos at [www.qbcentre.org.uk](http://www.qbcentre.org.uk)

Alongside the open days, the Centre is continuing to take its creative illustration projects into local schools and the Peel Community Hub at 3-Corners.



## People said ...

"I was fascinated by the exhibition and fell in love with the space. All the helpers gave a lovely warm welcome as well as providing helpful background information."

"I live close by the New River, and often walk along its banks. It's a wonderful green corridor. The engineering skills used to construct the New River always hold me in awe of humanity's ancient knowledge. It is a story that should be more widely known."

QBC must raise the £12m to restore, repurpose and reopen New River Head. Half the funds area already secured. Every penny counts so please visit [www.qbcentre.org.uk/our-new-home](http://www.qbcentre.org.uk/our-new-home) or contact Harry Hickmore at [harry.hickmore@qbcentre.org.uk](mailto:harry.hickmore@qbcentre.org.uk).

[Photo © Justin Piperger]

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The Society is open to all residents. For information about becoming a member, telephone 020 7833 1275 or e-mail [info@amwell.org.uk](mailto:info@amwell.org.uk)

Honorary President, Jane Wainwright. Chairman, Peadar Sionoid. Secretary, Joanna Ward. Treasurer, Keith Baker. Newsletter editor, David Sulkin.

The Amwell Society is a constituted group with annual accounts. The Society is a member of the London Forum

## The Amwell Society website

We launched our new website this year and we hope that you are pleased with the result. It is work in progress. We are looking for someone who has the time and skills to both maintain the site and take on the development. If you can help, contact the chair via [info@amwell.org.uk](mailto:info@amwell.org.uk)

## English National Opera

Some older members will know that English National Opera started life as Sadler's Wells Opera in 1931. Lilian Baylis popularised opera by demanding that everything be sung in English - a tradition that lasts until today. Miss Baylis was a redoubtable champion of the arts and a woman of the people. She was always strapped for cash but never took 'no' for an answer. ENO is facing a crisis - a vast reduction in its subsidy from the Arts Council. ENO's theatre, the Coliseum plays to 500,000 people a year. They reach 283,000 young people a year across England. For every £1 of subsidy ENO garners £2. Please write to Emily Thornberry, our MP and ask her to help save this national treasure for the nation. An e-mail; will do. [emily.thornberry.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:emily.thornberry.mp@parliament.uk)

## Christmas present

It's a sad truth that this year many families will be either cutting down or cutting back at Christmas while many will go without crucial, not luxury, food. Christmas is a time when families would prefer to feel secure and not worried about the cost of feeding the family. In most supermarkets, there are bins for collecting food items for local food banks. If you see one, drop in your usual contribution - pasta, biscuits, rice etc - as well as a luxury item; a box of chocolates for example, something you take for granted but might be out of the reach of some. The objective of the Trussell Trust, the charity behind the national food bank network, is to create a UK without the need for food banks.

In the UK, more than 14 million people are living in poverty - including 4.5 million children. Between April and September, food banks in the Trussell network provided 1,239,399 number of emergency food parcels to people in crisis - of these, 470,854 went to children. Overall, this represents a 47% increase in need during the crisis compared to a 23% increase seen this time last year.

### Additional support

The Trussell Trust helps people break free from poverty by providing support and advice to help resolve multiple crises faced by many so that they will no longer need to use food banks. Debt advice, mental health support and benefits guidance are lifelines.

Food banks rely on the support of local communities to support people in crisis so you might consider making a Christmas contribution in cash or in kind. The Islington Trussell Foodbank is at the Highbury Youth and Community Centre, 71 Ronalds Road, N5 1XB. Telephone 07753 222755. [www.islington.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.islington.foodbank.org.uk)

## Committee update. 2022 - 2023

The committee members are:

- o Keith Baker, Treasurer. Amwell Street.
- o Dale Barter. Amwell Street.
- o Josh Chalkley. Amwell Street.
- o Sally Hull. Myddelton Square.
- o Peter Kornicki. Granville Square.
- o Katrina Fialko. Great Percy Street.
- o Tony Relph. Amwell Street.
- o Peadar Sionoid, Chair. St John's Street.
- o David Sulkin, Newsletter editor. Wharton Street.
- o Paul Thornton, Lloyd Square.
- o Joanna Ward. Secretary. Great Percy Street.
- o Martin Worthington. Percy Circus.
- o Rowena Smith. Tysoe Street.

The committee meets about four times a year. We monitor local planning applications and arrange social events. It is this action together with the aid of the New River Conservation Area, that has helped protect the unique architectural features and community feel for 50 years. The New River Company and Lloyd Baker houses were part of the Georgian building boom around 1820. They make our area what it is. Our achievements include helping to achieve a permanent home for the National Centre for Illustration at the New River Head, championing the Modernist architecture of Berthold Lubetkin at Bevin Court and keeping a close eye on the Grade I Listed Finsbury Heath Centre in Pine Street.

## Christmas cocktails

In 1939 Ambrose Heath wrote: *This collection of divers drinks is offered for all those occasions when drinking is desirable: on a winters' evening by the fire, on the shady verge of a tennis court, at a party, in a pub; with friends or acquaintances and even those dearer, wherever they may happen to be together: to the advancement of the brewer and the wine merchant and the confusion of all dull dogs.*

### Saucy Sue

½ Brandy  
½ Calvados  
1 dash Apricot brandy  
1 dash Absinthe  
A squeeze of orange peel  
on top

or try

### Turf Club

½ Gin  
½ Grapefruit juice  
1 dash orange bitters  
1 dash Barcardi rum

N.B. No ice needed



# The Amwell Society. Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 50 years

## Mount Pleasant Post Office

One of our members has found a copy of a photograph taken through a shattered window of the Union Tavern - our local bistro - which still stands on the corners of Lloyd Baker Street, King's Cross Road and Farringdon Road. Mount Pleasant was badly damaged by bombing on 18 June 1943. The blast reached across the whole of the Amwell area. A single bomb completely destroyed the parcel section of the Post Office. It struck the block towards the north east corner causing a fierce fire which soon set the



whole building ablaze. Despite being fought for four hours, the entire building, except the basement, was gutted. 77,000 parcels were lost in the inferno and two members of staff were killed - a porter and a temporary sorter. 34 people were injured. The very same month the Germans were testing their V2 ballistic missile which terrorised the people of London since the driving sound of then missile could be heard until it ran out of fuel and fell silent. Then the people below knew it could fall on them with fatal consequences. The second photo shows parcels being rescued and sorted in Calthorpe Street.



### Early history

The area on which the Post Office stands was originally open fields on rising ground above the River Fleet. In the 18th century, a cold spring on the site was reputed to have medicinal properties. This attracted many bathers and the site became known as 'Cold Bath Fields'. Later the fields were used as a rubbish tip which, with more than a hint of sarcasm, became known as 'Mount Pleasant'. In 1790 the site was cleared to make way for a new prison. Opened in 1794, it was called the Middlesex House of Correction ...

... but soon became known as Cold Bath Prison and later Clerkenwell Gaol. Originally a criminal jail, it later became a debtors prison and closed in 1885.

### The Post Office takes over

In 1887 the Post Office adapted part of the vacant prison, the treadmill houses, for use as a temporary parcel office. The site was ideal because it was "in convenient proximity to the three great railway stations". However, postal workers objected to working at 'Cold Bath Fields', a name long associated with prison life, so the name 'Mount Pleasant' was used from 1888.

The old prison site was transferred to the Post Office in 1889. The prison gradually made way for Post Office buildings as more and more space was needed. The first building, devoted to the parcel post and the housing of postal stores, was completed in 1890. An extension was built in 1900 to accommodate the transfer of the London Letter Post Office from St Martins-Le-Grand. The old prison gate was incorporated into this new sorting office and not demolished until 1901.

The last remaining sections of the prison were cleared in 1929 to make way for an extension of the Letter Office. On 2 November 1934, the new building was officially opened by the Duke and Duchess of York.

The Post Office Underground Railway, which connected the Letter and Parcel Offices with King Edward Building, the Eastern District Office and the West Central District Office, was opened in 1927. The station beneath Mount Pleasant was the largest of the eight original stations within the system.

### Emergencies

In February 1937, the Post Office began to prepare for war, so that there would be as little disruption to the mail as possible. Staff were trained and prepared to take on extra duties and structural alterations were made to provide access to the Post Office Railway so it could be used as an air-raid shelter for staff. The auxiliary bomb disposal unit which was set up at Mount Pleasant earned high commendations from the commanding officer of the Royal Engineers for their efforts during the war.

In October 1940, a large bomb fell on the Farringdon Road entrance to the Parcel Block, the resulting crater caused the collapse of the road, cracks ran across the whole of the East Yard, making the yard impassable. Also the water main [the River Fleet] running along Farringdon Road was broken and the Post Office Railway tunnel was flooded.

## Welcome to new members

- o Peter Atkinson, Wilmington Square
- o Hari Jackson, Myddelton Square
- o Frank Osei-Opoku, King's Cross Road
- o John Sacks, Wilmington Square
- o Markus Findlay and Salma Haddad, New River Head
- o Hilary Barton, Britton Street

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