



**We send happy holiday wishes to all members with hopes for a peaceful 2024.**

A soft objective of the Amwell Society is to encourage neighbourliness and cohesion in our special community. So the newsletter is usually about upcoming events, plans and activities that inform members about the area, its history, and local goings-on. We try and include good news. We keep the subscription at an affordable level - at 84p a month - so that the Society is open to everyone. We are now encouraging and supporting occasional visits to the pub, the odd get-together over a lunch or dinner and we are aiming to hold more informal gatherings though the year so that we can all get to know each better. It might be fanciful, but isn't it good to say hello to a neighbour you know in the street, to come out for a winter pint or a glass of wine in the summer sunshine? Neighbourliness has to be worked at but the benefits are incalculable.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter. From a survey of members sometime ago, we were told that the printed newsletter, sent via your letterbox, is a welcome event. We try and cover news, current local matters plus a hint history, given that half of the houses in our area are Georgian and built 200 years ago. We are happy to carry news from across the area, so do get in touch if you'd like us to feature something of interest.

## The Old China Hand

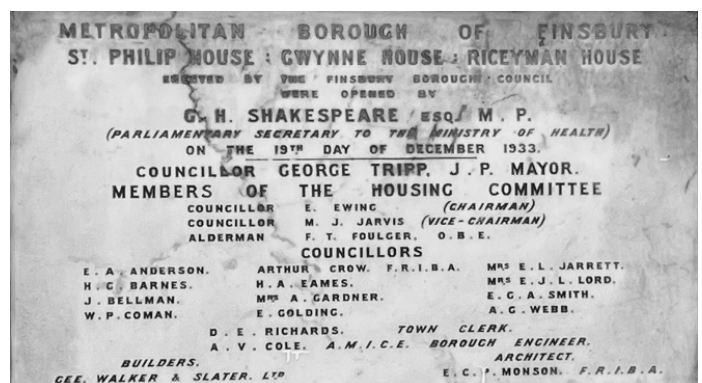
On the evening of Friday 24 November, we had a members' get together at the Old China Hand on the corner of Tysoe Street and Rosebery Avenue courtesy of Rowena Smith, committee member and owner of this cosy and welcoming little pub. About twenty-five members called in to have a drink during the evening. So, keep an eye out for an e-mail about the next evening drinks in the first months of 2024.

This was the first of a number of different kinds of events that we'll hold, from time-to-time, across the year. We'll let you know about each event with lots of notice.

## Charles Simmons House

London Borough of Islington [LBI] has opened - at long last - a new block of mixed social housing, Charles Simmons House. The quality of the build and the architectural sensitivity are excellent. The flats replace out-dated, utilitarian blocks from the 1960s. The construction had to be carefully achieved, not only so that it made a harmonious visual reference to the adjoining Margery Street Estate, but because the flats sit directly above the tunnel carrying the Thameslink and London Underground lines. For more information go to <https://find-an-architect.architecture.com/brady-mallalieu-architects-ltd/london/charles-simmons-house>

## Margery Street Estate. 90 years old



St Philip, Gwynne and Riceyman Houses on the Margery Street Estate were formally opened on 19 December 1933. Councillor Tripp, Mayor of Finsbury at the time, was the energy behind the building project. He ran a tailor's shop in Amwell Street. St Philip was the church that stood in Granville Square until 1938, Gwynne because of Nell Gwynne's connection with the area and Riceyman? See page 2 of the newsletter. Visit this plaque via the entrance to the Estate on Lloyd Baker Street. It's on the right side.

# The Amwell Society. Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 51 years

## Message from our Chairman

Welcome to our Christmas newsletter. It's the time of year we always like to take time, look back and take stock.

On local planning, we have contributed as best we can to the significant developments being proposed in Margery Street. The developments in question are the former Children's Society building and William Martin House which is a former old people's residential home. We are waiting to hear about next steps in both these cases. The future of the Children's Society building is the main concern.

The Society is very conscious about the number of significant neighbouring development initiatives on the periphery of our area. The Postmark development at Mount Pleasant is growing bigger and higher every day while the recently approved redevelopment on the corner of Islington High Street and City Road involves the demolition of a previously solid building dating from the late 1990s. Through our membership of the London Forum the Society aims to keep abreast of trends and potential encroachment on the Amwell area.

We have made some progress with LBI on tree matters. We have an agreement to plant seven trees in the Great Percy Street and Percy Circus area along with a proposal to plant another six trees in the Naoroji Street, near the Amwell Practice. We are supporting an initiative in Chadwell Street where there are no established trees at all. I am delighted that we are supporting the Quentin Blake Centre as, when it is up and running, we will be able to share the benefits of the Amwell area with a national and international community who will be visiting us for the first time.

We had a range of good events this year - 'events with a purpose' such as the Jean Elrington exhibition in April and the AGM in October. I was so pleased to see the AGM full and hope that, if you attended, you enjoyed the stimulating and visionary talk by Mike Tonkin and Anna Liu. At the Late Summer Party, I noticed how many members appreciate the opportunity to catch up with neighbours and make new connections. As a result, we had our first informal drinks party in late November at the Old China Hand. We intend to make these a regular fixture in the calendar for 2024.

## Friends of Granville Square

Autumn leaves and a general tidy up has taken place in Granville Square. More local action making the most of our local squares. Many thanks Granvilliers.

## Let there be light at Studio Amwell

Between 2 and 23 December there will be a pop-up exhibition of affordable art for the festive season at 37 Amwell Street. The Studio will be open from Wednesday - Saturday 13.00-17.00. Fifteen artists in all will be represented. Drop in for a warm welcome.

## Riceyman Steps. 100 years old

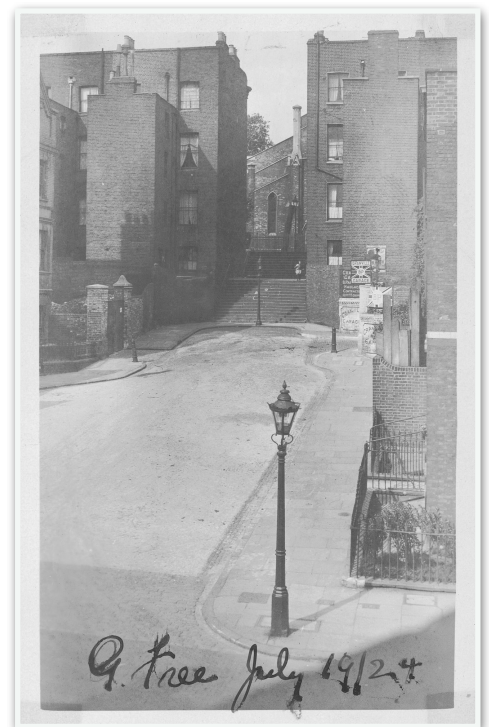
Arnold Bennett [1867 - 1931] wrote *Riceyman Steps*, which was published in October 1923. The novel was an immediate success and won the James Tait Black Prize for Fiction that year. The story is about the life of Henry Earlfoward, a miserly second-hand bookseller whose shop [fiction of course] stood by the steps that reach up from King's Cross Road to Granville Square still known locally as Riceyman Steps. The steps are under the archway of the Farringdon Travelodge.

The story takes place in the period 1919-1920, just after the First World War when our area and much of Clerkenwell suffered horrible poverty. Overall the novel deals with the final year in the life of Henry Earlfoward. Henry has developed an attraction for Violet Arb, a widow who runs a neighbouring confectionery shop. As Henry begins to court Violet in a clumsy kind of way, she realises that they employ the same charwoman who lives in the neighbouring square, at the top of the steps. Her name is Elsie Sprickett.

Elsie is walking out with a shell-shocked war veteran, Joe, who unexpectedly loses his self-control one day and runs after Violet with a carving-knife. Henry intervenes after Violet darts into his shop asking for his help. Violet, who sees in Henry a financially secure future, finally decides to marry him.

Joe, disappears after writing to Elsie that he will return when he has recovered from his mental disorder.

Henry is furious when Violet spends £14 to vacuum his filthy shop as a wedding present. He begins eating less and less and refuses to go to hospital to treat his undernourishment because of the associated medical costs. Elsie keeps working for the couple. She pines for Joe to return and pilfers meagre, cold left-overs from Henry and Violet's kitchen to keep body and soul together. In the end, it is Elsie who, despite her extreme poverty, brings life and light at the end of this perverse and gloomy tale.



The Amwell Society campaigns to protect and promote the area and its architectural heritage and to encourage a sense of community.

The Society serves Pentonville Road, Penton Rise, King's Cross Road, Farringdon Road, Rosebery Avenue and St. John Street and all the streets within the area.

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

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. Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 51 years

### News from the Quentin Blake Centre at the New River Head

The very first thing to say is that the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration [QBC] has a colourful, lively website full of information about the development of the New River Head. The site is a dream to navigate so you can swim through What's on, Our future Home, and National Illustration Day. The interface between Our future Home and National Illustration Day are especially interesting since the home of the QBC is already at the heart of our exceptional and vibrant community and the main compass point for the nation's interest in, commitment to and celebration of illustration. The first National Illustration Day was held on 24 November. It featured online resources for schools, a two-day pop-up Studio at the Angel Centre and other multiple online resources.

### The New River Head Viewing Platform

We are delighted to report that the popular viewing platform accessed from Myddelton Passage, where people begin their walks to the source of the New River in Great Amwell, Hertfordshire, or conclude their walks from the source of the New River, is open once again every Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday between 09.00 and 18.00. Amwell Society members and Myddelton Square residents volunteer to open up and close the gate ... so many thanks to all of them.

New panels have been commissioned by the QBC to illustrate the story of Sir Hugh Myddelton and his mad-cap scheme to supply the City of London with fresh water in 1613 by digging a new river from Hertfordshire to Islington. The lovely new playfully illustrated panels - appropriate for all ages - are the work of Nina Chakrabarti. Call in and see the new panels and the sturdy wooden bench generously donated by the Myddelton Square Association. The platform will be even more improved and accessible once the QBC is fully open.



### The 24 - 26 November

To celebrate the launch of the very first National Illustration Day, the QBC set up a pop-up illustration studio at the Angel Shopping Centre. Local people from all over Islington were invited to call in, discover the work of the QBC, see some of the exceptional community work being carried on around us by the QBC and try out some illustration. An outstanding display was the work recently achieved at the Peel Centre at Three Corners, near Spa Fields. The display shows the flowing New River with some of the local buildings and features of the natural, living world all around us. Our photo doesn't do justice to the vibrant colours used in this outstanding work.



### The Society to donate to QBC

The Society is about to donate £6,000 to the QBC as a modest contribution to the overall development plan. With several millions of pounds still to raise, the committee of the Society thought it appropriate to help support the Centre. We never keep large reserves, so with a recent surplus from the Jean Elrington exhibition and income from recent filming licences, we felt it is the right thing to do. The contribution will go to support the planned new landscaping of the QBC/NRH garden

Jessica Hogg who leads the QBC Development Campaign wrote to us: *'We're enormously grateful to the Amwell Society for its support. The green spaces at New River Head are much needed and are central to our vision for a place that really benefits the community. We're delighted that many of the trees planted on site will be gifted by an organisation that shares our passion for this remarkable pocket of London.'*

Further down the line, when the time is right, we'll help the QBC choose a special tree that will be dedicated to Jean Elrington who was our own prolific, local illustrator. A nice synergy there.

# The Amwell Society. Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 51 years

## A warm welcome to new members

- Gordon Abbott, Wharton Street
- Lee Bailey, Percy Circus
- Anna Brook, Inglebert Street
- Steven Davis, Claremont Square
- Paul Gillooly, Great Percy Street
- Rebecca Lander Great, Percy Street
- Wei Li, Fernsbury Street
- Denise Marshall, Amwell Street
- Heather Ticheli, Great Percy Street

## Membership and subscriptions

At the AGM in October, members agreed to simplify the categories of membership and subscription levels.

- **Standard membership.** Newsletter delivered by hand. £10.00 pa [84p a month]
- **Postal membership.** People further afield. £15 pa
- **Honorary membership.** Those who have served the Society in a special and significant way. Free.

These new levels will help keep the Society's day-to-day expenditure in balance. Last our routine costs - printing the newsletter, postage and other printing - have exceeded income by over 50%.

## Standing orders

Standing orders help us with our administration. So, if you can, please set up a standing order with your bank for £10.00 to be paid every 1st January, then we won't chase you for a subscription for twelve months. Our bank details are:

**Account: Amwell Society**                      **Co-op Bank**  
**Account number. 65192526**              **Sort code 08-92-99**

If you know your membership number, please quote it when completing the standing order.

## Committee update 2023 - 2024

- Diana Aurisch, Naorji Street
- Keith Baker, Treasurer. Amwell Street.
- Grant Costello. Percy Circus
- Josh Chalkley. Vice-chair. Amwell Street
- Sally Hull. Myddelton Square.
- Peter Kornicki. Granville Square.
- Katrina Fialko. Great Percy Street.
- Tony Relph. Amwell Street.
- Peadar Sionoid, Chair. Bartholomew Close.
- Rowena Smith, Tysoe Street.
- David Sulkin, Newsletter editor. Wharton Street.
- Paul Thornton, Lloyd Square.
- Joanna Ward. Secretary. Great Percy Street



## Christmas advice

For many years we have offered exotic recipes for alcoholic drinks at Christmas time. This year we have decided to recommend a particularly special recipe.

### Smoking Bishop

"... we shall discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a bowl of Smoking Bishop Bob!"



Scrooge. *A Christmas Carol*. 1843.

Illustration by John Leech

Smoking Bishop was a popular Christmas treat in early Victorian times and very likely drunk in many of the Georgian houses in the Amwell area when *A Christmas Carol* was first published.

- 3 unwaxed lemons [can be found at Waitrose]
- 4 oz [113g] sugar
- 18 cloves
- 1 pint [570 ml] of good red wine
- 1 bottle [750 ml] of ruby port



Bake the lemons in a moderate oven for about twenty minutes until golden brown and then place them in a warmed pottery bowl with six cloves pricked into each fruit. Sprinkle the sugar over the oranges and cloves, cover with a cloth and leave the bowl in a warm place for a day.

Take the lemons from the bowl, keeping any juice. Cut them in half and squeeze all the juice into the bowl, add the wine, which should be at room temperature, and then strain the wine and the juice through a nylon sieve into a stainless-steel saucepan. Add the port. Heat the pan ... but be sure not to boil the Bishop. Serve in warmed goblets and drink slowly.