

## A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR MEMBERS



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

**The Amwell Society was founded in 1972.  
2022 marks our 50th anniversary year.**

**Our neighbourhood looks and feels as it does today because of the action of the visionary founders all those years ago.**

**In 2022 we will be holding a History Weekend in June which will include a community picnic and a tree-planting campaign to underpin our commitment to climate change. We will be launching a brand new website as well as continuing to love the Amwell area.**

**Here's wishing everyone not only a Merry Christmas but a healthy 2022.**

## People Friendly Streets [PFSs]

When the PFS plan was implemented round the Amwell area and more widely across by Islington, the Society undertook a survey about the changes. Eighty-one members responded to the Society's survey which is a high percentage of about 200 households in membership. The striking feature of the survey was that it was roughly split into those members who whole-heartedly welcomed PFS, supporting key issues like cleaner air, less traffic and the encouragement of cycling, while other members thought the area was quiet enough and that restrictions crossing the area are too extreme. They felt that the area is hard for both residents who drive and delivery companies to navigate. It has certainly been true that, as Google maps and other navigating systems have not kept pace with PFS, drivers heading for a delivery have been confused about how to reach a particular address. No one - delivery people or private drivers alike - wants to cross a traffic camera line with the threat of invoking a heavy fine.

One matter on which most survey respondents agreed was that the speed to traffic travelling down Amwell Street from Claremont Square often goes too fast. This includes cyclists.

What is certain that we all value living in the Amwell area. PFS has changed traffic patterns and behaviours. To this end, and in response to PFS, it seems that further opportunities might emerge to maintain many PFS initiatives and propose to LBI additional measures in Amwell Street to make it more amenable for pedestrians by reducing traffic [especially down-hill bicycle] speeds and installing additional pedestrian crossings.

Members will remember that LBI is committed to undertaking a further consultation, twelve months after PFS have passed. We understand that that consultation will be launched quite soon. In order to prepare for the LBI consultation, the Society has set up a working group to consider PFS, with the aim of providing support and advice to members as well under-pinning the responses we had to the consultation which were representative of a wide range of views and opinions.

As soon as the Amwell Society is notified that the LBI consultation is imminent, we will send an e-mail to all members [who use computers] encouraging them to respond to the consultation. If you have a neighbour who is not a computer-user and who wants to take part in the consultation, please let us know and we will arrange for a paper consultation to be delivered. To do this send a message to [info@amwell.org.uk](mailto:info@amwell.org.uk)

# The Amwell Society. Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 49 years

## Message from our Chairman, Peadar Sionoid.

I hope you're enjoying the Christmas newsletter.

It is a pleasure to be writing you again in what has been, a difficult year.

As I reported at the AGM in September, the committee has had a busy year, even if we had many fewer social events than we would have liked. Our annual Late Summer Party in September was a highlight for many, especially as it had to be cancelled in 2020. We have been working with neighbouring societies and our Islington Councillors to scrutinise developments at the Mount Pleasant/Postmark Development and the redevelopment plans for the Children's Society building on Margery Street. Work has now started on the main Postmark building and its vast scale and bulk - equal to that of the Crowne Plaza hotel, will soon become apparent. That is one reason why the committee has made a list of all potential development sites in the Amwell area, no matter how tiny. We aim to be on the front foot when it comes to plans to build inappropriately in our beloved New River Conservation Area. The new block of social housing built by LBI at junctions Lloyd Baker Street and Margery Street, by the Union Tavern, which blends harmoniously with the Margery Street Estate, is now almost ready for people to move in.

In the summer we were pleased to jointly host a tour of the New River Head site along with the House of Illustration. It gave the opportunity for members to see and hear first-hand the details of the exciting plans for the site. Many members have told me how excited they are by the prospect of a new public space in the Amwell area with a deeply rooted commitment to illustration and to the arts.

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the Amwell Society. We have exciting ideas to mark this half-century. We are planning a lively and active History Weekend in June which will include a community picnic with live music. We have a tree-planting scheme in mind which we are currently developing with the London Borough of Islington. Many members will have seen that quite a lot of old or diseased trees which have had to be removed along many of our streets. The Society working on a scheme to raise funds locally to buy appropriate, street-friendly saplings which will be planted on our behalf by LBI. This, we think will be an appropriate, long-lasting and climate-friendly way to celebrate the amazing 50 years of benevolent impact that the Society has had and will continue to have on the Amwell area.

The new website will also be a celebratory and tangible symbol of the Society keeping up with the times.

I wish you, your families and friends a safe, healthy and enjoyable Christmas and New Year.

## House of Illustration at the New River Head. Paul Thornton reports...

The House of Illustration (Hol) submitted its planning application in May 2021 for the conversion of the disused industrial buildings at New River Head into the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration. The Society wrote in support of the application, as did the Islington Society and numerous other organisations and individuals and Society members. We asked LBI to make sure that agreements about such matters as the pedestrian route through the site would be watertight and not merely based on goodwill.

The LBI Officer's report should have been completed in time for the application to be considered at the Planning Committee meeting in November. I was hoping to speak in favour of granting planning consent. However, it emerged that there were considerable differences of opinion between the House of Illustration team and the Officers about the scheme. These centred around the harm caused to the listed buildings on the site caused by their conversion to a different use and whether the public benefit from the scheme would outweigh this harm.

This is a legitimate balance to draw, and one which requires good judgment and weighing of the evidence. The Local Engagement Group, with representatives of the Amwell and Islington Societies and Islington Buildings Preservation Trust, considered this matter before writing in support of the scheme. In our opinion the balance was overwhelmingly positive. We also believed that any other re-purposing of the buildings on site would do at least as much harm as the Hol proposals, if not more. The conversion of the site into a museum would clearly be less invasive, but no one has offered to do this in the 30 years since Thames Water announced their intention to vacate the site and when it was also designated as culturally significant.

Discussions between the LBI officers and Hol are ongoing. The gap appears to be narrowing. Hol has submitted revised Heritage, Interpretation and Communities, Arts and Education proposals. Ward Councillors have also made valuable interventions. The scheme is now due to go to the Planning Committee in January 2022 and we are hoping for a positive outcome.

For more information about the exciting work of the [www.houseofillustration.org.uk/](http://www.houseofillustration.org.uk/)

## The Amwell Society website

We are aiming to launch our exciting new website as soon as we can in 2022. Committee member, Josh Chalkley has been helping to build the new site with Peadar Sionoid and David Sulkin. We will have more flexibility to update the website in future and there will be new functions available too. When the new site goes live, we'll let everyone know.

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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) Chairman, Peadar Sionoid.

Secretary, Joanna Ward. Treasurer, Peter Kornicki. Newsletter editor, David Sulkin.

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## Clerkenwell Parochial School [CPS]

In the last newsletter we mentioned that Clerkenwell Parochial School was to close at the end of the summer term 2022. The Society was very concerned that the freeholders of the site, The London Diocesan Board for Schools [LDBS] might be tempted to sell the site for development. To ensure this the Society applied for the school buildings to be designated a Protected Community Asset, always a wise move when a school or public building is threatened by a change of use.

The story has a relatively happy end. While we were all sorry to see the demise of the 320 year-old primary school, the buildings now house the successful, Islington-based St Mary Magdalen Academy. CPS is now the home of the Academy's 6th-form. We are aiming to make friends with the 6th-form and that the 6th-form unit builds strong relationships with other cultural organisations, like the House of Illustration and Sadler's Wells. The educational link here is LDBS, as CPS was, and the Academy is, a Church of England School.

## Welcome to new members

- Sarah Levitt Allen, Barnsbury.
- Charles Cook, Woodbridge Street.
- Antoni Burakowski & Kerry Warn, Granville Square.
- Phil Jones & Sally Johnson, Granville Square.

## Coming up

In 2022 we hope to arrange a visit for members to the striking building, 15 Clerkenwell Close, which was shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2021. The building was designed by founder of the architectural practice Groupwork, Amin Taha.

## News from Myddelton Square

The Myddleton Garden group of committed volunteers have been award grants to assist them with their work of returning the gardens to the glory of former times. Over the weekend of 4 and 5 December more than 100 plants were planted ready for spring with another 300 to go.

Elaine Smith writes...We have been given £22,000 by LBI [£106 investment] to install protective fencing around the restored flower beds. This includes additional plants, compost, manure and mulch. Our Ward councillor, Matt Nathan was impressed by our energy and commitment. The clincher was some before and after photos of our previous work on site.

Additionally the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association has provided £386.49 for even more new plants. Income from location filming rights has helped too as has the Myddelton Square Association which donated £540.00.

All local initiatives, like the morning unlocking and evening locking of New River Head viewing platform in Myddelton Passage by volunteers, means we can all live in a nicer, cleaner and friendlier Amwell area.

## Committee update

At the AGM committee members were confirmed for the coming year. They are:

- Keith Baker, Amwell Street.
- Dale Barter, Amwell Street.
- Sally Hull, Myddelton Square.
- Peter Kornicki, Treasurer, Granville Square.
- Katrina Fialko, Great Percy Street.
- Andrew Mansfield, Amwell Street.
- Melanie Davies, Wilmington Square.
- Tony Relph, Amwell Street.
- Peadar Sionoid, Chair, St John's Street.
- David Sulkin, Newsletter editor, Wharton Street.
- Paul Thornton, Lloyd Square.
- Joanna Ward, Secretary, Great Percy Street.
- Jane Wainwright, founder member of the Society, Cumberland Gardens.
- Martin Worthington, Percy Circus.

The committee meets five times a year as well as organising the ever popular AGM. Between meetings we monitor planning applications through the LBI website and take a very close interest in community interventions, street planning and innovations such as the People Friendly Streets initiative. The Society - in fact the whole community - benefits from the volunteers who are developing and maintaining Myddelton Square Gardens. Thank you to Darian and Delia Mitchell, two other redoubtable volunteers who care for St Helena Garden, off Lloyd Square, which they have done for many years. One of our current campaigns is about litter, fly-tipping and dog mess; the least glamorous part of the Society's commitment to healthy streets and the environment.

## Christmas cocktails

At Christmas we usually include a cocktail recipe in the newsletter. Here are two. As staying at home is the new going out, no need to worry about travelling of any kind.

**Quaglino's Special.** Quaglino's was founded in 1929 and became the most fashionable restaurant in London in the 1930s.

- 1/3 Gin
- 1/3 French Vermouth
- 1/6 Italian Vermouth
- 1/6 Grand Marnier
- A wedge of orange peel, squeezed

Stir in a jug. Chase away the ice or snow.

**Quelle vie.** Kümmel is a delicious liqueur made with caraway seeds. It is a natural digestif. Half bottles available on line. [www.bbr.com](http://www.bbr.com)

- 1/3 Brandy
- 2/3 Kümmel

Stir, drink and go skating, if you dare.



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### Missing Square. Peter Kornicki writes...

Most readers of this newsletter will at some time or other have turned off Amwell Street to walk down Cruikshank Street. They will not know that before the war it was called Bond Street, but they may have noticed Holford Mews on the right, and perhaps the old sign for Holford Yard just down Bevin Way. Further on, Cruikshank Street turns into Holford Street before joining Great Percy Street, and those who live in Bevin Court know that the gardens at the back are called Holford Gardens. These names are the last traces of Holford Square, which used to stand where Bevin Court now stands. Who or what was Holford, and what happened to this once grand square?

The whole area was originally owned by the New River Company and Holford Square was only laid out in 1841-48, later than the surrounding streets and squares. The square was named in memory of Charles Holford (1774-1838) of Hampstead, who was Governor of the New River Company from 1815 to 1827 but was also a philanthropist and a friend of the painter Constable. While many of the squares in the Amwell area had churches in their centres, the area in the centre of Holford Square consisted of a garden with lawns and flower beds managed by the residents, but in 1934 it was turned into a bowling green by Finsbury Borough Council, the only such facility in central London.

In its time, the square had several famous residents. One was Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the philosopher who coined the expression 'survival of the fittest'. He lived there in 1847. The others, who lived at no. 30 from 1902 to 1903, were Dr and Mrs Jacob Richter. Who were they? They were, in fact, Vladimir Lenin and his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya. It was during this time, when Lenin was paying £1 a week for their two rooms on the first floor of no. 30, that he met Trotsky for the first time. In August 1903, the two of them held a conference with other Russian revolutionaries to plan the overthrow of the Tsar. For the rest of his time on this, his first visit to London, Lenin was either studying in the British Museum Reading Room or editing the revolutionary journal *Iskra* (Spark) in a little cubicle/office at what is now the Marx Memorial Library at Clerkenwell Green.

On 15 March 1942, during Finsbury's 'Aid for Russia Week', the redoubtable, long-serving Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky and his wife visited Holford Square to unveil a plaque at no. 30, which had already been so severely damaged in the blitz that only the ground floor was left. According to *The Times*, which carried a picture of Mme Maisky unveiling the plaque, 'The unveiling ceremony was carried out amid scenes of great popular enthusiasm' and Maisky was 'cheered to the echo as he spoke of Lenin's part in the building of modern Russia'. Two weeks later, on Lenin's birthday, 22 April, Maisky returned to Holford Square to

unveil a memorial containing a bust of Lenin by architect Berthold Lubetkin (1901-1990). In 1943 the bust was damaged and smeared with tar by vandals, who wrote on the memorial 'P.J.', which *The Times* explained stood for 'Perish Judah' and on the street 'Communism is Jewish'.

Mr Maisky protested about the defilement and so did Finsbury Borough Council, which 'reaffirmed the solidarity of the people of Finsbury with those of the USSR.' But the bust was deliberately damaged on several more occasions during the war. In 1946 three policemen were guarding it in 8-hour shifts. In 1947 the bust was removed and it can now be seen in Islington Museum. By this time, Holford Square was no more. All four sides had suffered serious damage and in 1946 the New River Company proposed to rebuild the square in neo-Georgian style. In the end the Square was not rebuilt. Instead Lubetkin was commissioned to design an ambitious modern block of high-quality flats for working people which was originally to be called Lenin Court. However, under pressure, Finsbury Borough Council, agreed to name the block Bevin Court which required only a two-letter change. Bevin Court was opened on 24 April 1954 only two days after Lenin's birthday.



For further information see Helen Rappaport *Conspirator: Lenin in Exile* Survey of London, vol. 47  
<https://pixelsurgery.wordpress.com/2011/11/22/holford-square/>

More photographs of the Square can be found at Islington Local History Centre and the London Picture Library

### Footnote

Vladimir Lenin became a regular visitor to London before the Russian Revolution. In 1912 he might almost have bumped into another Russian on a mission. After her husband and brother of the Tsar, was assassinated in Moscow in 1905, Grand Duchess Elisabeth, took holy orders and founded a house of nuns committed to the relief of poverty. The Grand Duchess had heard of the social work of the Sisters of Bethany, then based in Lloyd Square and came to London to pick up some 'tricks of the trade'. Lenin was plotting political change down the hill with a Russian aristocrat planning social change, at the top.

Buy Nicholas Riddell's book *A History of the Church of Our Most Holy Redeemer, Clerkenwell* available at the church in Exmouth Market and read more about the Grand Duchess Elisabeth.

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