

Evocative Amwell paintings by Jean Elrington

A special Spring event

Jean Elrington, architect, artist, wife and mother, was a founder member of the Amwell Society in 1972. She was born on 22 September 1928 and died peacefully last summer at her home in Lloyd Baker Street. Her husband Christopher was the first and very active chair of the Society.

Jean was a committed painter from childhood and continued to paint to the end of her life. She painted places that were close to her heart around the world and extensively in the area where she lived. Along with her architectural training, Jean's painting style was unique. Her vivid use of colour, her apparently casual and playful use of line, brush and perspective mean that the pictures are her legacy.

A significant number of local locations around the Lloyd Baker area, Amwell Street, Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell Green and some more distant parts of Islington are featured. Giles and Judy Elrington, Jean's son and daughter, have generously agreed that the Society can arrange an exhibition of Jean's work. The paintings will also be available to buy. Giles and Judy are especially keen that people who live in the Amwell area have the chance to see Jean's work and to purchase examples of it, if they would like to.



Jean's paintings will be exhibited and for sale at the Tripp Gallery

59 Amwell Street, London EC1R 1UR

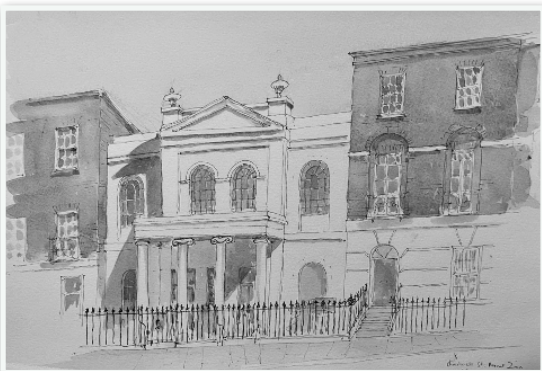
between Friday 21 and Sunday 30 April 2023

Opening times. See page 2

In addition to the exhibition, Jean's pictures will be catalogued and photographed and files given at the Local History Centre in St John's Street. In that way, the pictures will be kept together as a record of how our area looked in the 1980s, 90s and 2000s and a record of the paintings as a body of work widely available to people to see in future.

We hope that many Amwell residents and Society members will enjoy the exhibition which is being very generously hosted by Sharon Dowsett and Tony Relf at the Tripp Gallery. All Jean's Amwell pictures will be on display and for sale at affordable prices. Income from the exhibition will be used to fund a

memorial to Jean - a garden seat, a sapling or an etched window at the Quentin Blake Centre at the New River Head - with any residue used by the Amwell Society to enhance our area and underpin our mission to protect and look after our area. This is a one-off opportunity to see the collection together and to get to know Jean through her paintings. Only two works feature people - tiny figures in motion as the symmetry and shape of Amwell, Clerkenwell and Islington are what occupied her most of all. All of the works are mounted to help show how striking and full of character Jean's work can be. Plain frames will be able to be ordered, if required



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Opening times of the Jean Elrington Exhibition at the Tripp Gallery, 59 Amwell Street

Friday 21 April 7.30 pm until 9.00 pm [**members only**]

Saturday 22 April 12 noon until 5.00 pm

Sunday 23 April 1.00 pm until 4.00 pm

Monday to Friday 24 April to 28 April
3.00 pm until 7.00 pm

Saturday 29 April 12 noon until 5.00 pm

Sunday 30 April 1.00 pm until 4.00 pm

Locations featured in Jean's paintings

Great Percy Street

Various views Cumberland Gardens

Various views of Lloyd Square
including one picture that shows part of St Helena Garden

Amwell Street

Various views of Lloyd Baker Street
including the Union Tavern

Various views of Wharton Street

The corner of Wharton Street and Granville Street

'Riceyman Steps' in Granville Square

Mount Zion Chapel, Chadwell Street

The Betsy Trotwood pub in Farringdon Road

Various views of Exmouth Market

St James and Clerkenwell Green

A mystery location. Who can identify it?



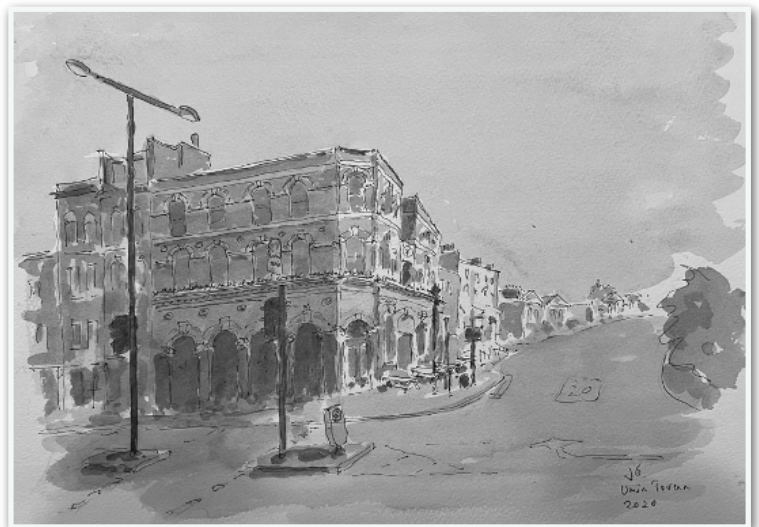
Buying a picture ... everyone welcome

If you visit the exhibition and decide to buy a picture you will be able to pay for it with a debit card or cheque. All the pictures will be available for collection once the exhibition is over, from 1 May onwards.

Thanks go to Joanna Ward, Tony Relph, Delia Mitchell Peadar Sionoid and Kieth Baker who have all been working to make the exhibition of Jean's pictures possible.

Members....

...please bring friends to the exhibition who might like to sign up there and then to join the Society. It's still only £7.00 a year to join. That's less than 19p a day. Possibly the cheapest subscription of any kind anywhere in the UK.



Members' launch event. Friday 21 April at 7.30 pm

If you'd like to attend the launch of the exhibition please let us know in advance. There is limited space at the Tripp Gallery. We'd be pleased if the launch event were to be full but we don't want members to feel the event is overcrowded or worse not be able to get in. Please e-mail exhibition@amwell.org.uk before 20 April to reserve a place.



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, telephone 020 7833 1275 or e-mail info@amwell.org.uk

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

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Notes from our Chair, Peadar Sionoid

On planning matters - so crucial for the protection of this lovely area - we very much welcome the completion of social housing by London Borough of Islington [LBI], at the junction of Lloyd Baker Street and Margery Street. Charles Simmons House creates 25 new dwellings as part of the Margery Street Estate. The apartments are a combination of 60% social rented and private 40% tenures for LBI residents. The building also provides a new community room, a retail unit, play-space and courtyard relating to the gardens of the estate. We are hoping that the Society will be able to hold occasional meetings in the community room as we did in the old building before it was demolished. LBI should be congratulated in creating new social housing.

We continue to seek a satisfactory use for the old Children's Society building in Margery Street. The original proposal was for a jumbo mixed-use building which would have encroached on our area and dominated the western end of the Margery Street Estate. Happily LBI refused permission for this proposal and we are keeping a close eye on what happens next. We have written to the relevant officers and Councillors requesting that the community be involved in any further pre-application discussions with any developer following the failed application. Had such discussions happened the first time around concerning appropriate development it is likely that the building would be in productive use by now. One element of this issue is that we believe that the old Children's Society [1960s or 70s] building should be maintained and modernised rather than wholesale demolition of the old building.

2023 is the first full year with reduced Covid risks so we expect to have a fresh and vibrant programme of social events. There are several events at the planning stage. We are beginning with the exciting exhibition of paintings by the late Jean Elrington which is the leading article in this newsletter.

A date for your diary is our ever-popular AGM which will be held on **Tuesday 10 October**. Annual General Meetings are rarely the most thrilling affairs but after the official business of reporting to the membership on the year past, our AGMs always features a locally relevant talk given by a willing guest of honour. To aid the event there are usually some glasses of specially chosen wine and carefully selected snacks. The venue for the next AGM will be confirmed closer to the time. If any member would like to propose a topic or a speaker for the AGM they would be welcome to do so. My e-mail address is below.

Work on our new splendid website continues and we hope to utilise it more dynamically in future to update you on developments in the area and develop some of the sections especially the Planning, History and the activities and events sections.

Please, feel free to approach me or any of the committee on any local or matter of interest via the website or at info@amwell.org.uk

Finally, it remains for me to wish all members happy spring

Focus on committee member, Josh Chalkley

Originally from Sydney, Australia, Josh moved to the Amwell area in 2020 and is still adjusting to London winters. He works as an in-house lawyer for a global solar developer.

He prefers dogs over cats, likes pineapple on pizza, and admits that chocolate chip cookies are his greatest weakness. He's an avid learner with an interest in design and new technologies. Last year he helped redesign the Amwell Society's website, which you can check out at www.amwell.org.uk

Josh joined the Amwell Society so he could to meet his neighbours, learn about the history of our area, connect and engage with the local community. He volunteers as webmaster and helps to steer the Society's activities as an executive committee member.

If you spot Josh grabbing a morning coffee from Ground Control in Amwell Street, be sure to say hello!



The Society welcomes new members

- Chloe Jahanshahi. Great Percy Street.
- Laura Jacobs, Amwell Street.
- Bianca Killingback, Wharton Street.
- Emma Mason, Wharton Street.
- Donald Ramsay. St John Street.
- Matthew Reinhardt. King's Cross Road.
- Sadler's Wells [corporate member].
- Philip Stopford, Wharton Street.

Tale of the trees. LBI please wake up.

Members will remember that the Society has more than £10,000 in the bank, raised through donations during our 50th anniversary year. The money is earmarked for planting of new and/or replacement trees in the Amwell area. In the spirit of community collaboration we approached London Borough of Islington [LBI] so that we could co-ordinate plans and subsidise the Council's tree-planting programme. We have been e-mailing and 'phoning different departments at LBI for a year with the offer of collaboration. So it's a surprise that no officers at LBI will take the lead and work with us on this project. Despite tight budgets, stretched services and the offer of a big donation in return for saplings and help with planting, we have met with silence and often excuses about how hard it is to work together and even harder for LBI to accept a hard cash donation. We are appealing to the CEO of LBI, the Leader of the Council, our Councillors, who seem disinterested in this initiative, so that we can find a way ahead. We are unable to commission the digging of sites for trees on Amwell streets and planting our own saplings. You can be certain that litigious LBI officers would come down on us like several tons of bricks if we took the planting programme into our own hands.

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Notes from our planning owl - wise and on the lookout

Amwell Society members will be aware of the eruption of tall buildings - 30 meters or 10 storeys - that has beset many London boroughs. Travelling through Ealing, for example, it is hard to imagine that it was once known as the Queen of the Suburbs. Take a trip on the Victoria line to Vauxhall or even more thrilling take the Northern line branch to Battersea Power Station and see the forest of tower blocks stretching from Nine Elms to Wandsworth Town. Islington has largely been spared this blight as tall buildings are currently being restricted to sites around the City Road Basin, Finsbury Park Station and the Islington part of the Kings Cross development. Proposals for 35-40 storey towers at Archway and at the Old Street roundabout are being opposed by the Islington Society and local community groups.

The Amwell Society's "patch" is protected from such developments, being within the New River Conservation Area. Islington's 2018 Tall Buildings Study concluded that *"Due to the extent of the area's sensitivity to tall buildings and its coherent low and medium rise character this part of the borough is found inappropriate for new tall buildings and therefore has been excluded from the tall building search".* We should breathe a huge sigh of relief.

However, the same is not true for developments on our perimeter. For instance the Postmark development on the Mount Pleasant site, most of which is in Camden, is about 30m in height and virtually all private flats with almost no genuinely 'affordable' housing. Work has now started on the blocks closest to Calthorpe Street and Farringdon Road. When fully built, the Postmark buildings will be the same height as the Crowne Plaza hotel on the opposite corner which is itself no oil painting. Maybe we have just got used to it, but once upon a time this hotel was voted the ugliest building in London. The new Postmark structures will certainly alter the look and feel of our area. We must press the developers to make good on their promises of new public realm and green space that figure so prominently in their sales literature.



At the opposite side of the Amwell area, the Society joined with other local civic groups to oppose (unsuccessfully) the new building proposed for the north-east corner of the Angel intersection, replacing the - it has to be said - lumpen - 30 year-old post-modern building on the corner.

Though not appreciably taller than the existing building, the new one will be far bulkier and has little to distinguish it from countless other urban office developments of a similar size and at a time when offices appear to be so pre-pandemic and much less significant than they were. The existing building is not to everyone's taste [though it has grown on me!] but I am saddened that it will be replaced by something that can best be described as workmanlike. Such a prominent site deserves better.

A little further away, the former Eastman Dental Hospital in Gray's Inn Road is being transformed into the new home for UCL Neuroscience. Originally this was to be a dementia research centre but it will now also house the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, with all the traffic and commotion associated with 24 x7 operation.

Here is an artists' impression of the new development which has incorporated much of the elegant facade of the old hospital that was the original home of the Royal Free Hospital.



While it appears to be a necessary and important move for the hospital, currently located in Queen Square, where, no doubt, the management and maintenance of the ancient facilities, started in 1860, are a constant challenge, the new block going up at the rear of the old Gray's Inn Road building, while not really tall, will certainly dwarf the residential terraces in surrounding streets and will be able to be seen on then horizon from numerous points in the elevated Amwell area.

We are incredibly lucky to live in such an attractive and well-conserved place. There is no point in objecting left-right-and-centre to all tall buildings in a progressive city like London. We must recognise that development 'at scale' is necessary if the city is to thrive and its population is to be well-housed and well-served. At the same time it is surely reasonable for us to ask that new developments are themselves well-designed and that they respect the context and character of their neighbours.

Paul Thornton.

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