

The Amwell Society Annual General Meeting. Tuesday May 21st at the St Mary Magdalen 6th form Campus in Amwell Street.

'Dull as ditch-water'. That's the impression that most people have of AGMs. It's never the case with the Amwell Society. After about thirty minutes of essential official business, there is always a talk by a specially chosen speaker. Usually 50-60 people come to the AGM which also involves wine and soft drinks and a light buffet. The Campus hall will be open at 6.30pm for drinks and snacks. The AGM will begin at 7.00pm and will be followed by our guest speaker at about 7.30pm. The AGM will conclude at about 9.00pm.

This year we will be delighted to welcome Dr Anna Keay of the Landmark Trust, who will give a talk about the work of the Trust in the context of a recent gift of a Georgian house to the Trust by a long-term resident of the Amwell area and founder member of the Amwell Society.

Dr Keay is a writer, historian and curator, with a special interest in 17th-century British history. Anna became Director of Landmark in July 2012. Born in the West Highlands of Scotland, Anna was educated at Oban High School in Argyll and Bedales in Hampshire. She read history at Magdalen College, Oxford, where she won two academic scholarships. Her PhD on court ceremonial in the reign of Charles II was supervised by Professor John Miller at the University of London. From 1996 to 2002 Anna worked as a curator for Historic Royal Palaces. From 2002 until 2012 she was Properties Presentation Director at English Heritage.

Late Summer Party on Saturday 7 September beginning at 6.00pm

Thanks to the generosity of residents, we have been invited to hold our Late Summer party in the Lloyd Square Garden for the first time. Lloyd Square is a private garden which is beautifully maintained by the residents with plenty of grassy areas. It is perfect for a garden party. We'll send reminders about the party in our next newsletter. As always, the Society will provide wine and soft drinks while members are invited to bring food to share - its usually a great spread. The party will conclude at about 9.00pm. So, put the Late Summer Party in your diaries.

News from the St Mary Magdalene 6th-form Campus.

In the past year negotiations have been ongoing between St Mary Magdalene Academy - its main buildings are at the north end of Liverpool Road - and the London Diocesan Board for Schools [LDBS] concerning the lease of the former Clerkenwell Parochial School in Amwell Street. We had been hoping that the Academy would be able to renew its lease for the 6th form campus but that seems not to have been possible with the result that the Academy has signed a lease on premises closer to home.

Daniel Goward, Head of 6th form at the Academy writes:

With the end of our lease on the horizon, we have been seeking alternative premises in the event that our campus in Clerkenwell became financially unsustainable. During this process we found a church building around the corner from our main site that until recently had been occupied by another school. Given the proximity of the site enables greater flexibility in our timetable and facilitates better movement between our sites, we have now signed a lease with St David's Church and will be vacating Clerkenwell Parochial at the end of the academic year.

We will, of course, be very sad to leave Clerkenwell Parochial behind. It has been an excellent resource for us over the last three years and an integral part of our 6th-form life.

It has always been fantastic to know that the Amwell Society supported our presence in the area.

We know, at this time, of no plans for the future of the old Clerkenwell Parochial School buildings although a 'To Let' sign has appeared on the school railings. The Society has written to LDBS to express our worries about the maintenance of Grade II Listed buildings should they be left empty. Some years ago the Society applied to the LBI to designate the school a community asset dedicated to educational use in future. CPS is now registered as a community asset which we hope will secure its future.

Greetings for the spring season and looking forward to summer.



The Amwell Society. Campaigning on behalf of the locality for 52 years

Message from our Chairman

Peadar Sionoid writes...

It's my pleasure to welcome you to our spring newsletter. The focus is on our magnificent garden squares and the successful efforts of local volunteers to revive and maintain them. In this issue the award-winning work in Granville Square is celebrated along with the work going on in Wilmington Square.

Many of you also know about St Helena Garden which has been maintained by Darian and Delia Mitchell since about 2000 and Myddelton Square Gardens where Elaine Smith and her team have achieved so much in a few years and not forgetting the activists at Bevin Court for their rewilding work. We hope to feature these additional gardens in the next newsletter.

In January, the Society facilitated a second meeting between the owners of William Martin Court in Margery Street and their architects with local residents. Significantly revised plans for the site were presented which appear to have taken into account some, if not all, of the concerns expressed last August. Questions remain about loss of light to some houses, which we hope will be addressed. A planning application was submitted in March, with a deadline of 21 April for comments.

At our last AGM, I promised a fuller social programme. Since then, we have had a two busy pub meets at the Old China Hand and a well-attended Christmas Dinner at The Union Tavern. The pub meets up will continue every three months and other events will be added through the year. A lunch and tour of the Royal Automobile Club [RAC] is arranged for Friday 26 April. For details go to the What's On page of our website.

Don't forget our AGM. Details are featured on the front page of the newsletter. We are excited that Dr Anna Keay, Director of the Landmark Trust to speak to us about her work. This is the time to invite members who would like to join the committee to contact us on info@amwell.org **Nominations must be received 14 days before the AGM that is by Tuesday 7 May.**

Lillian Baylis. Her 150th birthday

At 7.00pm on Tuesday 7 May on Spa Green, opposite Sadler's Wells, under the memorial tree, a short ceremony will be held to mark Lillian Baylis's birthday. She ran of the Old Vic from 1898 and from 1925 until 1931, she worked tirelessly to rebuild Sadler's Wells as a people's theatre for north London. The old Borough of Finsbury invested heavily in the project. Lillian Baylis's activism led to the creation of the National Theatre, English National Opera and the Royal Ballet. We are inviting representatives of those companies to join us for this special celebration.

Join us on Spa Green at 7.00pm for refreshments and speeches about The Lady's life and work. The event will last about an hour. No need to book.

Cultivating Community: Revival of Wilmington Square Gardening Club

Member, Kim Segal writes...

Wilmington Square has long been a place of elegance, tranquillity and community. However, like any Islington garden, it faced periods of neglect. Once home to a thriving gardening club led by Luci Eysers, its activities had dwindled over time, leaving the Square well-used but looking very unloved.

During Covid, I noticed the bustling life within Wilmington Square. Inspired, I began rubbish picking and soon found myself engaged in guerrilla gardening, planting seeds, weeding beds and tending to neglected corners. I approached LBI whose staff were delighted that there was interest in reviving the gardening club.

Encouraged by their support, we formed the Wilmington Square Gardening Club, supported by the Wilmington Square Society. Our local LBI ranger, Eremira provides tools, support, and guidance. Our gardening days are a highlight for our volunteers, a small but committed group of seven to seventeen dedicated local people. We love to encourage the participation of children in the community and we also encourage new members.

LBI's support has proved invaluable, especially since our primary challenge was the lack of a water source. This has since been remedied, though water has to be schlepped from the garden gates to wherever it's needed. With Council help, we undertook an ambitious project of the strategic planting of mature Pyracantha bushes along fences to deter fence-climbing and antisocial behaviour. A small group of volunteers are watering these twice a week for the next year.

Our once-unloved garden is blooming with vibrant life. Hundreds of daffodils, crocuses and wild garlic flowers are out. Flowering plants adorn many borders, a testament to our collective dedication. Beyond beautification, we have consciously planted to accommodate pollinators and wildlife in the space. Most of all, we've fostered a sense of belonging and pride in our community. In cultivating our garden, we've sown seeds of camaraderie and revitalised the very heart of our neighbourhood.

Thames Water

Shocking analysis in January shows that between April and December 2023, Thames Water released sewage into London waterways for 6,590 hours, 11 minutes and 54 seconds. A five-fold increase on the same period in the previous year.

'Leonard Jenkins, Cambridge coach, has confirmed members of the men's Boat Race team were sick due to the E-coli strain found in the water of the River Thames'. The Independent.

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News from Granville Square

Jeremy Linden writes...

Some ten years ago, a long-standing member of the Amwell Society rescued a Jack Russell from a dear friend who was dying of cancer. Although aware of Granville Square, living as he does in Lloyd Baker Street, he hardly ever had the necessity to visit ... but after adopting a dog, which needed exercise, he saw how sad and neglected Granville Square was looking and set out to do something about it. Instead of throwing surplus plants on his own compost heap he planted them in the Square. His 'guerrilla gardening' was soon discovered by the Parks Rangers at London Borough of Islington and far from being discouraged they asked him to form a friends' group which the Council could officially recognise and support. They would pay the insurance for Public Liability to cover any mishaps. The first person to say what a wonderful job he was doing became the Secretary, her husband the Chairman, and he the Treasurer. And so, the group, now known as the Granville Square Gardeners was formed. It now has over 80 members on its mailing list and is a thriving community garden.

When the group was started, LBI had only time to strim once a year the, what used to be, flower beds, mow the grass area once or twice and give the hedges an annual trim of what was left of them. Slowly, new hedging was planted, all flower beds and grass area dug over, then seeded, and surplus plants and shrubbery introduced from private gardens in the Square. After three years the Parks department realised the group was not a one-year wonder and that the group meant business. So they were offered a Service Agreement which enabled them to purchase tools, garden equipment, more unusual plants, and spring bulbs. Struggling with watering cans and keeping equipment at home the priority was to have a water supply installed and a shed to keep the equipment. That took two more years to achieve. Then five years ago LBI contractors decimated a section of the hedge in the wildlife area and mowed the grass at exactly the wrong time, the group undertook to do those tasks. Purchasing a lawn mower and hedge trimmer, all kept in the shed, has proved a great move as it enables them to carry out work as and when needed instead working to an arbitrary and chaotic Council timetable. The only task the Council now undertakes is emptying the bins and taking away the plane tree leaves that are impossible to compost. They create enough compost from other material not to have to buy any. Even litter picking is done by a dedicated member.

Three years ago, they raised sufficient funds to enable them to install a section of flower bed railings which proved so successful that they managed to obtain a grant from the council to complete the task for the whole square. Then last year they raised funds to buy a drinking fountain which the council kindly installed. All these improvements have manifested in them receiving the top grade in the RHS 'In Your Neighbourhood' scheme.

In 2023 not only did the Garden Group win 'gold' in the small parks category but also won the overall small parks award out of all other London boroughs. In addition, they also applied for and were given a



Granville Square, west side

Community Green Flag award. The Green Flag Award scheme, managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of green spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

Fruit trees were planted in the late summer and in the coming year they hope to install a pond to encourage wildlife. Hopefully with the help of a grant they will also have a power point installed. Twice a year they hold a picnic usually in June and September and hope to do so again this year.

If you'd like to join the Granville Square gardening group, e-mail friendsofgranvillesquare@gmail.com



Granville Square, facing east

**Put the date and time of the AGM in your diary.
Tuesday 21 May.
Arrive around 6.30pm for the AGM at 7.00pm.**

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Clerkenwell Fire Station. 10 years on

The former Fire Station, in Arts and Crafts style by HFT Cooper dates from between 1912 and 1917 and is Listed at Grade II* and has significant architectural interest. The Fire Station ranks among some of the best examples of a distinctive group of fire stations designed and built by the LCC after 1900 which are widely admired as being among the most accomplished civic buildings produced by the LCC Architects' Division in this rich and prolific period. In the attic there is a very rare and complete communal laundry with all its fittings thought to be the only such surviving example nationally. Throughout London you can still see many similar monumental municipal buildings from this period up until WWII.

Clerkenwell Fire Station is massive and imposing and presents a local conundrum. Its bulk and detailing are reassuring. Replacing it with a ubiquitous steel glass block of flats is not on the agenda but having been summarily closed ten years ago by Boris Johnson as Mayor of London it is extremely unlikely to be reinstated as a fire station. So new uses must be found. The fire station has now been sold to Ocubis, a dynamic property company which owns, develops and manages commercial and residential properties throughout London.



Clerkenwell Fire Station photographed in 1921

Keith Baker, Treasurer of the Society, who recently visited the Fire Station with members of the Islington Society, observed that '*...the upper floors - which originally served as a section house for firemen and their families - comprise many small rooms, corridors and staircases which, these days, would not appeal to residential tenants.*'

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Paul Thornton, committee member, also toured the fire station with Keith Baker. Paul writes:

Keith and I participated in the visit to the Fire Station. The event was arranged by KANDA, acting for Ocubis. The tour was led by two heritage specialists engaged by Ocubis to document the building and form a basis for deciding its future. They have done a lot of work on the building and produced an impressive document - though they wouldn't release it to the Islington Society.

The big surprise is that Ocubis intends to turn the building into managed workspaces, rather than residential although they may still build homes on the perimeter of the site. This acknowledges the evident difficulty of turning the space into desirable modern apartments, given the limits on what can be done to a Grade II building. I think the Amwell Society should support this direction of travel, though Keith and I have serious reservations about the viability of such a scheme.*

The future of the Fire Station raises several questions. The building is Listed Grade II* and commands a great portion on the corner of Rosebery Avenue and Farringdon Road but inside it is not generally thought to not be fit for purpose as residential accommodation - which is a great shame given the need for good affordable housing. If the building cannot be adapted for residential use, can it possibly work well for small businesses? It would be very satisfying if a huge effort were made to create really affordable housing in this metropolitan edifice, once so vital to our community.

Pentonville Road entrance to the tube.

When the new Thameslink platforms were opened at St Pancras Station, the old platforms, close to the Amwell area, were closed. The entrance in Pentonville Road at the junction with King's Cross Road then only provided access to the tube via quite long tunnels. The up escalator then broke down and lay unprepared for months. Then came Covid and the entrance was closed completely. There was no consultation. Last year the whole site was boarded up and is now covered by graffiti.

Question to the Mayor of London. 24 January 2024.

Q. The permanent closure of the entrance to the Victoria and Piccadilly lines on Pentonville Road. How will the GLA be working in collaboration with TfL to actively address concerns raised by residents?

A. The Pentonville Road entrance at King's Cross Underground station has been closed since 23 March 2020. This decision was made jointly by Transport for London [TfL] and Network Rail. Network Rail owns the building and TfL is responsible for the entrance, including the building's exterior.

The old booking hall is a low, single story building. Should it be at the target of redevelopment, a campaign to reopen this entrance to the tube will be launched by the Society and other local groups. Watch that space.