

Drugs in the Amwell area

Part of the Amwell Society's remit is to promote neighbourliness. At its best, that means advising on local issues that improve our area; gardening initiatives, and actions that promote security and beautify our streets. So it's a shame to have to report in full on the numerous hotspots which are subject to drug dealing and use at all hours of the day and night and cause significant concern and anxiety. At present, Wilmington Square is often being used by dealers day and night. Activities have also been regularly noted in Myddelton Square, Granville Square, Myddelton Passage and at the New River Head viewing platform which is open for visitors from Thursday to Sunday. Here is some advice and guidance concerning drug dealing.

1. Drug dealing is fluid. Dealers and purchasers use different locations and when one location becomes risky, they move to another dark or leafy spot, often nearby.
2. Working with residents' groups to monitor this activity is helpful. The significance of the Clerkenwell Ward Safer Neighbourhood Panel [CWSNP] has increased and is now the most useful co-ordinating group. Any evidence you can supply will be helpful - times, locations, descriptions. If you can **safely** record any activity this is also useful.
3. **Note:** For ease of use, type in **Clerkenwell Your Area** and you'll be taken to the relevant part of the Metropolitan Police's website for the CWSNP.
4. Sharing information across the various neighbourhood networks will give an effective picture to everyone and help us to act together. Myddelton, Wilmington and Granville Squares all have networks of resident groups.
5. Collecting information - times, dates and types of activity taking place - will help police monitor the situation at critical times. All information that you can gather is relevant. Means of transport. Registration numbers of cars or scooters. Appearances of people. Types of activity. Numbers of people coming and going. Anything of note.
6. Talking to neighbours and telling them about action gives reassurance to everyone and keeps people informed

It's important that no one confronts drug dealers themselves. Personal safety is vital.

Keeping an information diary containing as much detail as possible and sharing the details to members of your group, the Amwell Society and our Safer Neighbourhood colleagues is the best and safest thing to do. Ring 999 if you see drug dealing going on and ring 101 if you see people are using drugs.

Our Late Summer Party

This year we have been invited by Lloyd Square residents to enjoy their square which is not open to the public. Our annual Late Summer Party will take place on Saturday 7 September between 5.00pm and 8.00pm. As in previous years all members are welcome. The Society will provide wine and soft drinks. Members are invited to bring food to share.

Please note the start time of the party this year. 5.00pm

We have held the Late Summer Party for many years and it's always a great success as well as pleasure to hold the party in St Helena Garden, which the Society has cared for, for twenty-five years. We are so fortunate to have the help of Delia and Darian Mitchell from Lloyd Baker Street who look after the garden for us. Thank you Delia and Darian.

Lilian Baylis's 150th birthday

The Society was the host of Lilian Baylis's birthday party which was held under the Baylis Tree at Spa Fields on 8 May. The party was attended by a big group of Society members and invited guests from English National Opera [until 1974 Sadler's Wells Opera], members of the Vic-Wells Association and the Royal Victoria Hall Foundation. Miss Baylis ran the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells simultaneously from 1931 until her death in November 1937. Sherry and birthday cake were served and many old friends met for the first time in several years. We welcomed Valerie Colgan, theatre director and chair of the RVHF, members of the Vic-Wells Association including the secretary, Dmitri Kalinin, David Pountney, Director of Productions at ENO in the 1980s and 90s and Charles Kraus, son of Otakar Kraus, who was a leading baritone at Sadler's Wells in the 1950s and 60s. Annilese Miskimmon, the current Artistic Director of ENO and Michael Doran, until recently, Principal Percussion in the ENO orchestra, were also there. Alice King Farlow, Director of Learning at the National Theatre joined us along with Natalie Sinnadurai who was the administrator of the Baylis Programme at ENO in the 1980s and 90s. It was an excellent celebration.

Amwell Society noticeboard

The board, next to Browning's Garage in Great Percy Street, is going to be regularly updated. There'll be space for messages offering local services, offers and requests. If you want to display a service or offer something free-of-charge, make a notice no bigger than A5 and send it to info@amwell.org.uk Notices will be changed from time to time but will be displayed for a minimum of a month.

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Message from our Chairman

Peadar Sionoid writes...

It is my pleasure to welcome you to our Summer newsletter. As promised, we are continuing the focus on our magnificent garden squares. In this issue Elaine Smith describes the work that she and the Myddelton Square gardening group have done over the past years to transform their Square.

Sadly, there is also a darker side to our squares – drug dealing and other anti-social behaviour. Whilst this seemed to be abeyance for a number of years, there has been a significant resurgence recently with Granville and Wilmington Squares being the worst affected. Based on the experience of our members and neighbouring societies, we have shared some advice at how to approach this issue. The simple message is consistent reporting of incidents to the police and sharing this information with LBI and CWSNP. Wilmington and Granville Squares have temporary CCTV installed by CWSNP and undergrowth has also been trimmed. The Squares will be closed at night for a trial period.

On planning, it has been a relatively quiet time. Of the developments we have been monitoring, the application to extend William Martin Court in Margery Street for use as accommodation for the families of recuperating patients was approved last month by LBI. There is no further news on the former Children's Society building also in Margery Street. This application, to extend the building by building upwards, was refused for a second time by LBI and will go to the Planning Inspectorate in September.

Those of you who attended our AGM in May were rewarded with an illuminating talk about the work of the Landmark Trust by Dr. Anna Keay, Director of Trust.

I promised an enhanced programme of social events – since then we have had fully subscribed lunches at the RAC and the National Liberal Club along with three pub meets-up along with Lilian Baylis's birthday party.

All members are invited to join our Late Summer Party, Saturday September 7 – taking place this year in Lloyd Square from 5.00pm until about 8.00pm. We are just beginning to think about autumn events and the build up to the end of 2024.

Longer term, the committee is thinking about how to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the construction of the Georgian housing in our area. As the majority of houses were built between 1820 and 1830, the committee is looking at 2026 as a suitable year for this. Taking our history weekend in 2022 as a model, we are looking at a series of events both social and educational over two weekends. If members have ideas or would like to contribute and help as we begin to build the programme for the celebration, please contact us at info@amwell.org.uk

Cultivating Community: Progress in Myddelton Square

Elaine Smith writes ...

Myddelton Square Gardens have changed over time. They were formally laid out in Victorian times and were given over to allotments during the Second World War to help the Dig for Victory campaign. In the 1970s all the flowerbeds contained a multitude of rose bushes.

After the resident Council gardener died, the gardens became almost derelict when most of the flowerbeds were turfed over with grass. Since then we have started a gardening group to restore the gardens.

When launching the group we decided to include as many rose bushes as we could since they bring such a variety of colour, are often highly scented and give such pleasure. When we started to restore the gardens we included new rose bushes. The display this year has been the best ever.

We are now introducing scented plants everywhere - a lavender hedge behind benches, more scented roses along with jasmine and honeysuckle. To the left of the main gate, Amanda, a resident in the square donated a sensory bed of different bushes surrounded by a hedge of Sarcococca which produces scented flowers in the winter.

We are gradually starting to plant the perimeter beginning with three Grape Myrtles - a beautiful flowering tree on the west side.

Restoring the gardens is an ongoing and ambitious project but the results are well worth the effort. We have been awarded prizes by the Royal Horticultural Society [RHS] which we are looking forward to receiving at Wisley in October. A true recognition of all the hard work of the Group and volunteers.



Myddelton Square Gardens looking west.

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Our very own fig tree

Joanna Ward writes ...

Walk down Amwell Street towards Rosebery Avenue and you cannot fail to notice the huge fig tree in the front garden of what was, until recently, the Clerkenwell Parochial School.

It is wider than it is tall and is so huge that it needs steel props to bear the weight of each of its three ancient trunks.

It is known as the Amwell Fig and is mentioned in Paul Wood's book, *London is a Forest* [Quadrille, 2019]. Wood tells us that the Amwell Fig 'is one of the sixty one Great Trees of London, a list of historic trees drawn up by the charity Trees for Cities.' The complete list can be found at www.treesforcities.org.uk.

It seems that the fig is in an ideal position to thrive, getting full sun in the morning and shade in the afternoon. When the adjacent, recent buildings were erected on the site of the old Initial Towel laundry, there was fear locally that the tree would be damaged and die. However, with care from the contractors, the tree has not been affected at all and is as strong and vigorous as ever.

Figs symbolise knowledge, enlightenment, passion and fertility and have a long history in connection with human development. Their importance is mentioned in numerous world cultures and religions. Also, figs are highly nutritious. Eating 125g [two small figs] provides as much calcium as drinking 125ml of milk. One 30g fig has more fibre than prunes and more potassium than bananas. The Amwell fig produces thousands of baby figs every year, all of which fall from the tree. Would it be possible, with better pruning and husbandry we could produce our very own Amwell figs? Is there anyone connected with the Society who could advise on this? Please let us know.



The Amwell fig in full leaf. Summer 2024

The Amwell Fig is thought to have been planted at the time the school was built in 1828 so will soon be celebrating its 200th anniversary - although this majestic tree should be celebrated every day.

The Society is aiming to install a plaque noting the tree's significance in the forthcoming months.

Garden waste recycling

Garden waste recycling has long been a valuable service for gardeners in the Amwell area. LBI has had success working with the North London Waste Authority turning our hedge cuttings, leaves, rose dead-heads etc into compost for use on the fields of East Anglia and in sacks in garden centres. Recycling at its very best.

From 2 April 2024 gardeners now need to buy an annual permit for garden waste collection. A permit costs £75.00 a year and collections occur every second week. Each permit holder can fill three green Islington recycling sacks at a time and to ensure that your cuttings are collected, you need to attach a hardy label which LBI supplies with your household details on it. The permit costs £37.50 a year if you receive Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support or Universal Credit - you'll need to tell LBI your support number when you sign up.

You can subscribe to the LBI Garden Waste Collection Service if you live in a property with a garden that you or a number of residents maintain and are able to leave garden waste sacks outside your property for collection. You can apply for a permit online www.islington.gov.uk/recycling-and-rubbish/recycling/garden-waste-recycling Once you have paid LBI will send you a label and a timetable for collection. There is a checklist of items that you can put out for collection. They are, grass clippings, leaves, plants and prunings, weeds, small branches, hedge trimmings. The collection cannot include: soil, food waste, bricks or rubble, plastic flower pots or bags, large branches and non-garden waste.

Charging for collection of garden waste has started in many London boroughs. The charges are all part of keeping Council Tax charges within about 5% rise and finding other ways to attract additional income.

It's worth noting that if you put out a green garden sack without a permit attached, the waste won't be collected. Many full sacks have appeared around the Amwell area of late which have languished for weeks on the pavement.

Can you help? We are looking for...

- **Website.** A tech savvy member to help develop and maintain our splendid website.
- **Planning.** A member who will monitor local planning applications to LBI. No specialist knowledge required.

Both roles will be fully supported by the committee. We are a friendly sociable group. If you'd like more information, please drop an e-mail to info@amwell.org.uk

Upcoming events

We are planning some local gatherings and events for the autumn and will send e-mail with information well in advance of each one. Watch out for those reminders.

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Charles Rowan House

When the renovation began at Charles Rowan House [CRH], it became clear that the chimney stacks and significant areas of brickwork badly needed repointing along with replacement of all the old single-glazed Crittall windows. The long period spent under scaffolding must have been miserable for tenants and residents, but the resulting reduction in heat loss in winter, better sound insulation and windows that fit snugly must have been a very satisfactory outcome worth waiting for.

But ... when the scaffolding was taken down it was a shock to see the quality of the repointing work that has been carried out. The bright creamy, modern cement mortar is a crude and distracting by comparison with the original dark sandstone-coloured bricks and ruby red mortar matched for the purpose.



Charles Rowan House before the renovation began.

The unique profiles of the four sides of CRH, which are not dissimilar to the profiles of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, are all part of the effect intended by G Mackenzie Trench in 1930 when he designed CRH as accommodation for Metropolitan Police Officers and their families.

In fact CRH seems a little like a cathedral. It has been a valued Listed building for many years now and it is [or was] a triumphant and confident complement to the architectural styles of the Amwell area from the classical Georgian houses [1820-1830], to the contrasting Modernist Bevin Court [1951], to Clerkenwell Parochial School building [1838], to the Neo-Gothic St Mark's Church in Myddelton Square [1843], to the 21st century infill villas in Cruickshank Street, the mews houses off Inglebert River and Chadwell Streets, the new Sadler's Wells [2000] and finally, along with the solidly built, symmetrical double crescent of flats in Claremont Close [1930s]. All these styles show the eclectic impact of two centuries of harmonious building styles that sit easily side-by-side with each other in the Amwell area.

Costs and affordability are the bread and butter issues of government and local authorities but the truth about this debacle is that the costs of carefully choosing bricks that sit easily with the old bricks, would have been a simple task. Then, only a few hundred pounds-worth of cement colouring would have protected CRH and helped it live up to its Listed status in our unique neighbourhood. We have written to the LBI Conservation Officer and were pleased to discover that LBI is also concerned about this careless work. The blending issues *were*, we are told, part of the conservation specification.



Although in black and white, the crude pointing is clear.

The story of CRH is an object lesson. Listing a special building should protect it ... but that protection is a living obligation requiring responsible owners - in this case, London Borough of Islington - specialist planners, commissioning architects, contractors and tradespeople who are alert to needs of protected buildings. We have trusted those people to do the best for CRH but they have failed our community. That is why the Amwell Society exists and tries hard to be vigilant. Had the Society had a suspicion that the renovation work at CRH was being carried out carelessly and without attention to the Listing and the aesthetics of the old Section House, we would have acted at top speed to make sure that the work, at virtually no extra cost, was carried out with care and attention to detail. It is too late.

Dr Who and the Amwell area. G. Mackenzie Trench was also the designer of the blue police boxes that were a feature of many towns and cities in the UK until the 1960s. Until that time, a PC could blow a trusty whistle or run to one of these boxes and telephone the nearest police station. The boxes are better known nowadays as Dr Who's Tardis.

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