

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

No 40 September 2004

## Turkish Culture, 'Alaturka'

By Alison Carmichael

Mention 'Turkish' identity or culture, and most North Londoners will think of the dozens of kebab restaurants in Green Lanes, freshly stocked greengrocers and delicious pastry shops in Newington Green, and probably also Kilim and Turkish rug shops in the West End. Exotic maybe, to those brought up on western food and furnishings, but to Nail Kavlakoglu and his partner Bengu Guder, there is a wealth of beauty, elegance and richness in the art and artefacts of their native country, not properly represented in this country, which deserves wider appreciation. Their small, stylish shop, Alaturka, at the St Paul's Road end of Corsica Street, and just opened in July this year, is the focus for their drive to spread knowledge and understanding of Turkish art, history and culture. Ceramic ornaments, bowls and plates, wooden boxes and inlaid backgammon sets, jewellery, pictures, textiles and glassware form an attractive and colourful display.

"We met in this country" says Nail "but we are both originally from Safranbolu, a beautiful old city in North Western Turkey, which was once the summer retreat of the Ottoman Emperors and is recognised as a city of international cultural importance. We are keen that people in this country should see a representation of Turkish art and culture not normally found on the high street, so our shop stocks only handcrafted and high quality pieces. We even have replicas of famous ceramics displayed in the V & A and Topkapi Museums, which are beautiful as well as being of historic interest." Their respective backgrounds mean that they hope the venture will be commercially successful, as well as being educational for the wider community and their customers. Both are graduates, Nail of medicine and Bengu of business studies, and can share with visitors to their shop, fascinating explanations of the history and source of the goods on display.



The beliefs invested in the blue and white 'Evil Eye' discs and the large pendant ceramic balls, shown in the picture on the left, changed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. For centuries, the practice was to hang one at the doorway of the home to protect the family while the man of the house went off to war. If he failed to return, the talisman would remain hanging to protect

the family; if, however, he returned safely, it would be ceremoniously and joyously smashed to the ground. Later, these brightly decorated ornaments were hung prominently in the home as a sign of the wealth and prosperity of the family. They are still bought as symbols of good fortune.



The roots of the idea to spread understanding between countries and cultures came from Nail's time in Istanbul some years ago. He and his British friends there noticed that the Turkish people's impression of British culture was a negative one and, unfortunately, heavily influenced by experience or knowledge of rampaging and drunken English football hooligans in Istanbul, or elsewhere. Over a period of four years or so, Nail and his friends held academic debates and meetings to exchange views on many topics. Large parties attended by a hundred or so British residents and three to four hundred Turks were held.

Nail believes the whole venture was very successful as a method of promoting cross-cultural understanding and explains, "I want to achieve something similar here and I'm a member of various discussion and community groups. But I see a need to do more than just exchange views by email or in meetings – hence my belief in the importance of objects, which tell a story in a pleasing and memorable way. Bengu and I are hoping to have some input into the Royal Academy's coming exhibition next January. The idea is to help source high quality replicas of some of the beautiful objects on display, for sale in the Royal Academy shop." And as for the objects on sale in Alaturka, Nail and Bengu hope that people will come to browse and enjoy what they see. "Even if they don't buy anything we want people to come away with an understanding of what is meant by Turkish art and culture." □

Alaturka, 1a Corsica Street, N5, 1JD. Tel: 7288 8778. email: [info@alaturka.co.uk](mailto:info@alaturka.co.uk)

Exhibition "Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600 - 1600AD" Royal Academy 22nd January to 12 April 2005. [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)

## Are tall buildings good for us?

It is a curious fact that Islington Council has recently produced a draft policy paper seeking to restrict building heights in the borough to the current agreed limit of 30 metres; but constantly gives approval to much higher structures, in deference to GLA policy.

**Highbury Fields Association** is making an important contribution to the acrimonious debate in political circles about the current rash of tall buildings. Planning expert, Lora Nicolau, from architects, DEG W, will give a talk on *"The role of tall buildings in managing intensification and change"* at the HFA AGM, which starts at **7.30pm** on **Monday 6th September** in Christ Church, Highbury Grove. All welcome.

## Charity quiz night

Help Great Ormond Street Hospital and pit your wits against your neighbours at Highbury Roundhouse on **Saturday 11th September** at **7.30pm**. Supper with wine and auction. Buy individual tickets for £10. Or form a team of 6 or 8 with friends! Ring Tony Miller - **7354 0863** or Caroline Reilly - **7359 5916**. Advance booking advised.

## Lamp-post banners rejected

In the last issue we warned of an application to put large advertising banners on lamp posts in Blackstock Road and elsewhere. HCA lodged an objection and this plan has been rejected by the planners, although previously accepted by the Council in its capacity as owners of the posts. It seems as if last year's council-speak buzzwords "joined-up thinking", have been forgotten already. If an application is contrary to policy, as this one clearly is, why does the Council encourage people to seek consent?

## Gillespie Park Festival

Is on **Sunday 12th September 12-6pm**. Children's storytelling, ethnic music and dance. Green crafts and stalls. Tel: **7354 5162**.

## London Open House

The annual "Open House London" event takes place on **18th & 19th September**. Over 500 buildings are opening their doors and turning the capital into a living architectural exhibition. Tel: **09001 600 061** [www.openhouselondon.org](http://www.openhouselondon.org).

## Council skip service hiccup

The much valued BIG SKIP Service provided by the Council at specified street corners throughout the borough every week, has been affected by the relocation of council services from Ashburton Grove. Arsenal's consultants have not yet prepared the new site off Vale Royal for the storage of the LBI large covered skips. Meanwhile, Brewster's skip hire company, which moved to Stratford to make way for the Stadium, are providing the Council with small open skips until the end of September, when it is hoped normal service will resume. Tel: **7527 2000**.

## Arsenal construction - Drayton Park

Residents met officers and Arsenal contractors two months ago to discuss site clearance works and noise over the summer from works in Drayton Park. Late night working related to bridge construction has caused problems. For information on timings ring McRedmond - **07767 648377** or **07950 315055**. Paul Clift (LBI) is on **7527 3199** to advise on noise and other environmental issues both here and at the Ashburton Grove site.

## Bryantwood Road and Benwell Road

Comments on various traffic calming options in Benwell Road and views on the road closure of Bryantwood Road should be sent by 10th September to [owen.davies@islington.gov.uk](mailto:owen.davies@islington.gov.uk) Tel: **7527 8650**.

## SEASIDE HOLIDAY OR WEEK-END BREAK?

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*Are you interested in joining the Highbury Chamber Choir? Soprano and bass singers especially welcome. Rehearsals every Tuesday, starting again on 21st September.*

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## For Rent in Highbury Hill

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## Highbury Chamber Choir in Concert

On 27th November 2004

At 8 o'clock

In St Thomas's Church, St Thomas's Road

Taverner, Sheppard, Gibbons, Britten

Tickets £5 on the door, concessions £3

Contact Nicky Spice on 7354 1129

# Highbury's starring roles

By Mark Mason

Highbury has been used as the location for a number of films. The first film of note was the *Arsenal Stadium Mystery*, released in 1940. Scripted by famous author Graham Greene, this stars Leslie Banks as a Scotland Yard detective, investigating the murder of a football player during a charity match between Arsenal and a team called the Trojans. There are some good football scenes filmed in the stadium and a cameo appearance by the then Arsenal manager, George Allison. However, there are disappointingly few shots of the surrounding Highbury streets.

The Finsbury Park Astoria in Seven Sisters Road was the setting for scenes in three notable films. It features as a concert venue in both *The Young Ones* (1961) starring Cliff Richard, and *Breaking Glass* (1980) starring Phil Daniels and Hazel O'Connor. In *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), the cinema foyer was used to represent a Turkish restaurant in Istanbul, at which a notable cast, including Albert Finney as Poirot, Lauren Bacall, Ingrid Bergman, Sean Connery and John Gielgud, have dinner before setting out on their eventful train journey. The Moorish decoration of the interior of the former cinema, designed by E A Stone, certainly lends itself to such a setting.

The area around Highbury Fields was used for a number of scenes in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994). The flat shared by the characters played by Hugh Grant and Charlotte Coleman was at 22 Highbury Terrace. The exterior of this house featured in a number of scenes, usually with the actors rushing out the front door because they were late for a wedding, and including the famous scene in the rain with



HIGHBURY CORNER, LOOKING TOWARDS UPPER STREET

Andy McDowell (*"Is it still raining, I hadn't noticed"*) that will not be remembered as one of her best performances! Grant and Coleman were also filmed running down Highbury Place into Highbury Corner.

The film which features Highbury most prominently must be *Fever Pitch* (1997). Based on Highbury resident Nick Hornby's classic football memoir, it stars Colin Firth as Arsenal fan Paul, Ruth Gemmell as his girlfriend Sarah, and



HIGHBURY STADIUM WEST STAND

Mark Strong as his equally fanatical friend Steve. Nick Hornby also wrote the film script, and he has a cameo role in the film as the manager of a school football team. One of the classic moments in the film is when Sarah asks *"Where do you live?"* Paul replies *"Arsenal"*, to which she responds *"Inside the stadium or just nearby?"* And indeed many of the scenes are set inside the football stadium, and in the surrounding streets. Key locations are the Arsenal tube station entrance, Blackstock Road, the lower end of Highbury Hill, the West Stand (opposite which Paul has his flat), the East Stand and Avenell Road frontage, houses in adjacent Conewood Street and the Arsenal Fish Bar in Blackstock Road. Filming was done over several weeks during 1996.

Finally, most people will not know that long before *Fever Pitch*, Nick Hornby wrote the script to a "short" (15 minute) film called *Faith* (1988), which starred John Sessions, Saskia Reeves, Leslie Grantham and Gary Lineker. This film also has football fanaticism at the heart of its story, with an Arsenal fan staging a rooftop protest at a house directly opposite the Stadium. ■

## 'Paved with Gold' - says Tim Newark

Recently, residents of Highbury were surprised to see teams of engineers spending weeks putting down new paving stones and road surfacing along Highbury Barn and Highbury Park. Surprised, because the area covered didn't really need the new paving stones and surfacing. They'll be even more surprised when they know the cost of this needless work: £350,000 - and that's just a starting figure.

The council says the work was funded by Transport for London - but that still comes out of our Council Tax. Add this to the pointless "build-out" at the junction with Highbury Hill, needless new street lamps in the Barn, and all the construction work to carry out the Gillespie CPZ (which was rejected by a majority of residents), and you have a glorious picture of a profligate council. But, of course, they'll still turn round and say they don't have enough money - and need to raise our Council Tax further. ■

## 'The changing face of Islington' - Competition

Can you tell where in Islington these two scenes are? That's not too hard; but HCA member, Elizabeth Smith, is offering a £15 book token for the person who can guess most accurately when the two scenes were photographed, as well as identifying the location.



Send replies by email to [hcanews@hotmail.com](mailto:hcanews@hotmail.com) or by post to **83 Highbury Hill, N5 1SX** by 1st October, describing the location and giving your idea of the dates of photo A and photo B.

As usual the editors' decision is final - but the interesting part is, we don't actually know **exactly** when photo A was taken. So, do your research, and convince us you know best!

## Oasis becomes a real haven

By Beatrice Sayers

The Oasis Café on Highbury Fields has been transformed thanks to Yehia El-Nemer and his wife, Penny. They took over the cafe, which serves tennis players, joggers, dog walkers, and just about everyone who uses the northern end of the Fields, from an Italian couple, Tony and Anna, who had run it for many years.

After months of behind-the-scenes work, Yehia and Penny staged a grand reopening on 13<sup>th</sup> April – a double celebration since it was Yehia's birthday. The balloons and bunting weren't the only difference thirsty café-goers found; the premises had undergone a complete revamp. Yehia and Penny had installed a new kitchen and opened out the garage-like covered area so it could be used when the London weather isn't all we'd like it to be. To the delight of regulars, they will open the café all year; previously it would close from October to March.

"We spent a lot of money doing this," said Yehia, pointing to the new kitchen. "But I didn't do it for myself," he added. "It's for the community. The people here [in Highbury] are so nice." He and Penny also had to put a new roof on the café, which they rent from the council.

An unusual gold pen topped with a Tutankhamen figure sometimes sits by the till, a reminder that Yehia is originally from Egypt. He has lived in Highbury for more than 20 years, working during that time in the hotel industry, where

he worked his way up from the kitchens to become a manager. He and Penny, a former food and beverage manager, have two children, Charles, 10, and Alexander, eight. Penny works as an administrator at William Tyndale School in Upper Street.

Yehia says the council is pleased at the changes that have taken place, especially the extended opening: January is the only month when the café will close. "Mothers say it was too long to wait from October till March, and they were going to playgroups in the area with nowhere to stop off for a snack," Yehia says. "It's nice for them to see it open all year."

Hot drinks are now served in china cups, and the menu has been expanded to include a dish of the day – freshly prepared on the premises – and more exotic foods such as falafel and Egyptian potatoes. But don't fear if your taste is less adventurous: sandwiches, chips, crisps and muffins are also still served, with a smile. ■



YEHIA OUTSIDE THE NEW OASIS CAFE

# Why Highbury?..... Why? When? What now? What next?

*HCA interviews Mark Ford, poet, author and academic, who has published two collections of poetry, *Landlocked* (1992) and *Soft Sift* (2001). A regular contributor to the *London Review of Books* and *Times Literary Supplement*, he has written a definitive study of the French writer, Raymond Roussel, as well as articles and books on many aspects of nineteenth and twentieth century British and American poetry. Highly regarded and acclaimed as one of the best young poets in England today, he explains what he likes about Highbury as a place to live and work.*

**HCA** - Why did you choose to live in Highbury?

**Mark** – I lived in Kyoto for two years where I had a post as visiting lecturer and happened to read and thoroughly enjoy Nick Hornby's 'Fever Pitch' while I was there. He painted a very strong picture of Highbury and I liked the idea of somewhere with a definite 'character'. I had friends who had moved to live here too, so I came to live here nearly 10 years ago and now never want to live anywhere else! To me, Highbury is the perfect example of the best of London's 'areas' or districts. It is accessible to the centre of town, and yet has wonderful urban open spaces like Clissold Park and Highbury Fields. My young daughter loves the deer in Clissold Park. The other very important aspect of this part of London for me is that many authors and publishers are based

here. People forget how much literary culture depends on meeting people and that it doesn't just survive on the internet. For example, Mick Imlah, (poet and poetry editor at the TLS) lives nearby in Finsbury Park, 'Between The Lines' publishing house is in N4 and 'Serpent's Tail' is close too. I also like the fact that left wing tradition has had a strong presence here for years.



MARK AT HOME IN HIS HIGHBURY FLAT

**HCA** – When did you first get interested in American poetry and when did you start writing yourself?

**Mark** – After coming down from Oxford I spent a year at Harvard from 1983 to 1984 and was very excited by the difference I found in the poetry there. It seemed to be much more accommodating to a range of experiences and it is more open-ended than poetry from our country. It makes less use of the strict forms on which English poetry is traditionally based. I find it uplifting and liberating. Perhaps one could say that, by contrast, Philip Larkin's poetry is more depressing. I started writing poetry at Harvard and now I'm lucky that my academic post gives me time to write at home. Academics do get quite a lot of time off! The poems in my collection 'Soft Sift', were written here in my Highbury Hill flat.

**HCA** – What now?

**Mark** – We are trying to move home, since what was my study is now my daughter's bedroom. We will definitely stay in the area. Local issues I care about include the survival of the fantastic shops at The Barn – the parking restrictions are not helping them. On balance I want Arsenal to have its bigger stadium here; AFC is so important to many children here, but I don't like seeing our sky at the end of Aubert Park disappearing to the new stadium.

**HCA** – What next?

**Mark** – Selling the flat! In the long-term I see myself lecturing at University College London until I retire, and living and writing in London, which, in my view, is the hub of the literary world. I'm currently putting together a collection of essays I've written over the last few years for the *London Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Review of Books*. It is being published next year by a local publisher, Waywiser Press, which is based in Finsbury Park. ■

*Landlocked*, Chatto & Windus, 1992; 1998 and *Soft Sift*, Faber & Faber, 2001/Harcourt Brace, 2003. ISBN: 0571207812.

## The Passing of the Passenger Pigeon

Mark Ford

This bird used to be the most numerous on earth  
And to blot out the sun for hours over Wisconsin and Michigan  
And to strip bare the great forests of cranberries, pine-nuts, and acorns.

Whole trees toppled under the weight of roosting birds. In flight  
They made a sound like Niagara Falls. Horses trembled,  
And travellers made wild guesses at their numbers and meaning.

The bird's sad demise is chronicled on many websites. Children  
Visit these for homework, and learn how far and fast the passenger pigeon  
Flew, and that its breast was red, and its head and rump slate blue.

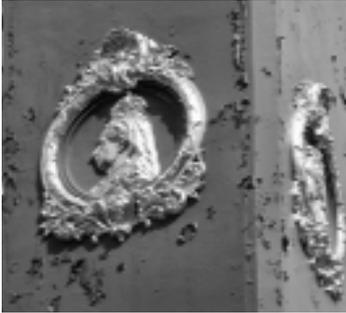
As the opulent sun set, racoon-hatted hunters would gather with pots  
Of sulphur, and clubs and poles and ladders; in a trice they'd transformed the dung-  
Heaped forest floor into a two-foot carpet of smouldering pigeon.

Being so common, they sold in the city for a few pence a dozen.  
Farmers fed them to their pigs. By the century's end they had all  
But joined the Great Auk and Labrador Duck in blissful oblivion.

The last known passenger pigeon was called Martha, after Martha  
Washington. She died in Cincinnati Zoo, on September 1st 1914. Her stuffed  
Remains were transported to the capital, and there displayed in the Smithsonian.

(Reprinted by kind permission of *London Review of Books*, where this poem first appeared - Why not subscribe? Visit [www.lrb.co.uk](http://www.lrb.co.uk))

## Council neglects elderly lady



"WE ARE NOT AMUSED BY SUCH LACK OF RESPECT" SAY VR & HCA

The lady in question is Queen Victoria, as she appears on the 1897 Jubilee clock tower at the top of Highbury Hill.

In 1997, after decades of rusting away under a coat of sickening, municipal-green paint, the clock tower was splendidly refurbished in its original livery and the clocks were replaced. The work, which cost £65,000, was funded partly from a lottery grant.

HCA has been trying since May to find out when the Council is going to do urgent maintenance repainting to preserve this local landmark; but we cannot get any definite information, beyond an acknowledgement that it is the responsibility of the Greenspace team.

Park Ranger, Joe Graber, from Greenspace, explained that he has asked the Council's fitters to supply an estimate for the work, but has received no reply. He conceded that finding money could be a problem, although the cost is only a few thousands. There are only four people in the fitters unit and they have to cover minor repair jobs for the whole borough; so we could be in for a long wait, even if they do eventually price the job, and Greenspace finds the money.

The longer we wait, the more it will cost. HCA member, Robert Scott, thinks the Council is tackling the job in the wrong way. "Since this is a gilded public monument, not just park railings, it would make sense to put the job out to tender with a specialist firm" he claims. "In the long run, it could be a lot cheaper. It is depressing that the Council seems to care so little about its public monuments, but worse that there appears to be no policy of planned maintenance to make sure public money is spent wisely. The good news is that officers readily accept that this job is overdue". ■

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*Highbury Community Association*

The HCA represents 750 residents and businesses, on all aspects of living and working in Highbury, Lower Holloway and Finsbury Park. Run by volunteers, it relies on donations. Send cheques to HCA Treasurer, 79 Highbury Hill, N5 1SX made out to "Highbury Community Association". Send letters or articles for next issue to: HC News, 83 Highbury Hill N5 1SX or email [hcanews@hotmail.com](mailto:hcanews@hotmail.com) Visit [www.highburycommunity.org](http://www.highburycommunity.org)

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