

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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Church Path: finding solutions to a growing risk Highbury Residents' Working Group

Changing use of church path

Church Path, at the top of Highbury Fields, is a heavily used path, linking Highbury and Highbury Corner for both pedestrians and cyclists. It is currently unregulated and thanks to a surge in fast-moving electric bikes, heavy cargo cycles, and commercial delivery riders, it has become increasingly dangerous and chaotic.

As well as entry at the top and bottom, this busy path has six lateral entry points, creating multiple opportunities for unpredictable encounters between cyclists and pedestrians or with children and dogs from adjacent park spaces. The risk is particularly acute at the midpoint crossing near the children's play area, where vulnerable users are exposed to speeding and unpredictable cycle traffic.



The midpoint crossing near the children's play area

Insufficient recognition of danger

Residents have expressed deep concerns about anti-social cycling and safety, and current minor steps by the council - small painted signs and speed advisory posters—are proving inadequate for managing these risks.

Proposed Solutions

Initially, the introduction of strategically placed chicanes to enforce lower cycle speeds was discussed, but councillors saw difficulties with these.

A group of Highbury residents working together to propose solutions to these new dangers now suggest segregating the path into dedicated pedestrian and cycle lanes, with clear ground demarcation, as has already occurred on the adjacent path which crosses Highbury Fields.

They also propose the protection of the six side entry points to the path

by marking them with wide coloured 'speed bumps' surmounted by zebra crossings, to clearly signal caution and pedestrian priority, particularly near the children's play area. The pedestrian lane should also be located on the eastern side, adjacent to the children's play area for extra protection.

Finally, a commitment to independent local authority safety assessments before and after implementation of solutions is asked of the council, including temporary CCTV monitoring and direct surveys of path users.

Conclusion

Urgent action is recommended to ensure the safety of all path users - both cyclists and pedestrians - with an emphasis on the identification of the risks arising from fast-changing Church Path use, and the implementation of effective, independently-audited solutions.

Your views on this issue are welcome.
Please write to us at hcanews@hotmail.com



The Origin Of The Italians In Highbury

Rebecca Marston



An early Italian grocer's shop in Clerkenwell

One of the many pleasures of Highbury living is the diversity of shops around Highbury Barn: Turkish, Indian, English - and Italian.

50 years ago, Highbury had its very own Little Italy. Local residents Gianna Cinalli and Claire Mansi, both of Italian heritage, and Marian Robertson, who has been looking at the history of the area, shared their knowledge and memories with us.

In the 1970s Da Mario's was there, then not only a shop, but also a restaurant. Next door was Gabriella's, a hairdresser's, named after Mario's daughter. Gianna remembers working at Gabriella's as a teenager. Mario's and Gabriella's were joined by other Italian-owned businesses, spread among the shops around Highbury Barn and the smaller row opposite St Joan of Arc Church. Aldo ran a café where Iznik restaurant now stands. There was also Roberto's, opposite the church, in the premises currently named HR - a sweet shop that later expanded into a green-grocers. On the corner of Lucerne Road, Rocco's moved in from a couple of streets away - a delicatessen that also sold cakes and pastries. It was a favourite of Tony Blair's in the 1980s when he lived in Stavordale Road and

his children attended St Joan of Arc's primary school.

The origin of this remarkable concentration of businesses can be traced to the better-known Little Italy of Clerkenwell, which first became a destination for Italians in the 19th century. Disruption caused by wars, particularly by World War Two, prompted waves of migrants seeking an escape from poverty. Some Italian Highbury residents moved up from Clerkenwell seeking more space for their money. Gianna's mother's own family moved into Highbury in 1947, buying a house in Kelross Road. Giana's father's family - also Italian - lived round the corner in Highbury Park. Both came from Italy's far south - Ravello and Nola respectively.

In the 1970s, from the corner of Aberdeen Road up to 71 Kelross Road, practically all the houses were Italian-occupied. The women's view was that when houses on Kelross Road became available, the community would tip off friends and relatives, creating a self-reinforcing neighbourhood.

Earlier incomers to the area were the Sperati family. They owned one of the substantial properties on Highbury Park, which originally came with mews facilities for horses and carriages in Kelross Road. Mr Sperati named his house, Rosa Alba House, after his daughter, and the name lives on as Rosa Alba Mews.

Finally, Joan of Arc church itself owes a lot to Highbury's Italian community. Initially Mr Sperati's house was used for Catholic gatherings and then, as the congregation grew, a pre-fab church was built where the community hall is now. Finally, the modern church on Highbury Park was built, the world's first ever dedicated to the newly canonised St Joan of Arc. The church itself attracted more Italians to settle nearby, and it also helped anchor another incomer catholic group present in significant numbers in Highbury - the Irish.



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Finsbury Park Festivals 2025

Katie Dawson

This summer Finsbury Park – the green oasis relied upon by ever more people in this increasingly built-up corner of north London – was taken over by the usual round of massive events and festivals.

The idea of a concert in the park is a pleasant one, but residents know it isn't like this in Finsbury Park where the pimping out of a precious green space for commercial events has got completely out of hand.

Every year cumulative damage to the park becomes more and more apparent. This includes scarification of large areas of grass which never fully recover; damage to trees, which have large branches removed or are cut down entirely to accommodate HGVs and other equipment; damage to carriageways and paths that lead to flooding and create hazards for cyclists; and – probably most serious of all – soil compaction, caused by many thousands of people in a small area, which stops trees being able to take up water and nutrients, and leads to their slow death.

Opposition to the commercialisation of our urban green spaces is

growing. The recent successful legal action brought by residents near Brockwell Park against Lambeth council has highlighted this and galvanised others. The case found that Lambeth had breached the 28-day annual limit for holding commercial events in Brockwell Park (it planned events on 37 days) and banned it from using the additional days for this purpose. However, Lambeth went ahead with all of its scheduled events in apparent breach of this ruling.

The residents are awaiting a date in court to challenge Lambeth again. In Finsbury Park, Haringey council exceed the 28-day limit even further (they hold events on 47 days). If our neighbours in south London succeed in getting the 28-day limit legally enforced, all London parks will benefit and some measure of balance between commercialisation and public good might be restored.



Finsbury Park: trees felled without consultation to make way for heavy equipment

THE WEBSITE

FOR ARSENAL'S NEIGHBOURS

<https://www.arsenal.com/the-club/local-residents-news>



Don't forget that Arsenal football club has created a website specially for us, its local neighbours.

Because those of us living near the stadium must pay for RingGo electronic parking permits for our visitors on match days, it is essential that we know when all relevant matches are going to be. These days this does not just include the men's matches but the increasingly frequent women's matches and all other fixtures.

Parking limitations and the need for parking permits comes into play as soon as an event is expected to have an audience of 10,000 or more.

We are lucky enough to have an Arsenal employee who keeps this website up-to-date for us, so please do use it!

Help us keep our membership list up to date. Let us know if you have moved, or have updated your email address.

If you think your neighbours would like to receive the newsletter, simply ask them to email us and we'll do the rest...

Please contact us at hcanews@hotmail.com

Who Controls The Privacy Of Our Medical Records?

Franc David

Back in 2014, a leaflet dropped through every letterbox in the land explained that patients' personal and confidential medical information would thenceforth be supplied to the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) by GP practices through a process of data extraction called care.data. By default (unless an individual objected) such data could be used for secondary purposes, not directly concerned with the individual's own care. An opt-out was possible (HCA Newsletter 85, February 2014) and the initiative fizzled.

Fast forward a decade. In February 2023 the Institute for Government reported on the NHS Covid-19 Data Store and NHS National data Platform. The report commended the speed with which data sharing between institutions had improved during COVID, but warned that transparency in data-sharing with the public was essential if public trust was to be won.

In November 2023, despite this, a 7-year contract for a Federated Data Platform (FDP) of the health records held by NHS England, starting in 2024, was awarded to Palantir. Palantir is a U.S.-based tech firm with deep ties to surveillance and military technology, working closely with ICE and Trump's US government, and on 'support for war-related missions' with the Israeli government, rather than on public service or healthcare (goodlawproject.org).

Unnervingly, 417 out of the 586 pages of the NHS contract with Palantir were redacted (blacked out), so they were not publicly available. And about three quarters of a complementary contract with IGIVA selected to provide 'privacy enhancing technology,' was also redacted, including the section on the protection of personal data. Health Minister Streeter has also been



axing patient watchdogs and professional groups that oversee contracts in NHS England and replacing them with AI dashboards - a move which could hand yet more power over health systems to firms such as Palantir (goodlawproject.org).

NHS data is so valuable because of its time-depth, and because the NHS is a public service. But once GP-level data is copied to the centre, it will be up for sale. Streeter has proposed 'patient passports' (where all data about an individual is held in one place) and Palantir is in the running for that contract too. Giving patients direct access to our health records, so that we can see

what data is held about us, would be a positive step, but that is not yet guaranteed (foxglove.org.uk; medconfidential.org).

Every use of NHS patient data could be consensual, safe, and transparent. But at the moment, multiple NHS trusts have raised concerns or are resisting the rollout of the FDP, because it is not. (justtreatment.org). Were Nigel Farage to lead the next government, our data in the hands of Palantir could make us very vulnerable indeed.

Patient groups actively campaigning to monitor the ways in which our data can be used include the Good Law Project (goodlawproject.org), Just Treatment (justtreatment.org), Foxglove (foxglove.org.uk), or Medconfidential (medconfidential.org). You can safeguard your personal NHS data by exercising an opt-out. Contact your GP practice, or go to any of the above organisations online.

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Ring-Necked Parakeets – Love Them or Hate Them?

Gill Shepherd

Invasive ring-necked parakeets, originally from India and Pakistan, have seen a dramatic increase in numbers in the UK, with a 2,400% rise over the past 28 years. Their growing population is causing significant competition with native bird species, and with bats, for food and nesting sites, particularly in South East England.

A significant population began to establish itself in Kingston-upon-Thames in the late 20th century, leading to a rapid expansion across London in the last decade. Parakeets have become nearly as common as pigeons, and have now even moved beyond the M25. London's extensive green spaces, comprising 47% of the city, provide ideal habitats for parakeets, allowing them to thrive despite cold winters.

This expansion is contributing to the decline of native bird populations, such as turtle doves, willow tits, bullfinches, and chaffinches, which have



seen substantial decreases in numbers. The government regards the spread of parakeets as “unstoppable” and has deemed culling impractical, so they are rapidly becoming a permanent part of London's avian landscape.

They currently only have one predator in London, where they have increasingly fallen prey to peregrine falcons, which number around 40 breeding

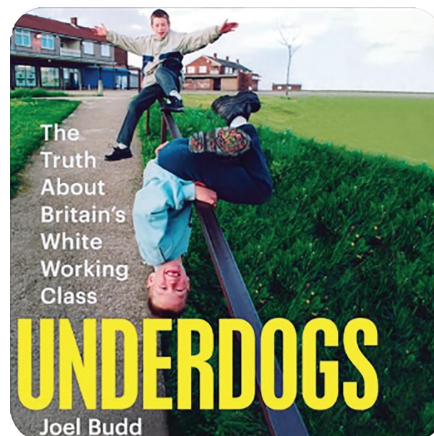
pairs in the city. Research from King's College London revealed that during lockdown, parakeets constituted 18% of the falcons' diet, compared to 15% in subsequent years when pigeon numbers rebounded. King's College researchers suggest that as the falcon population stabilizes, the numbers of their prey will also adjust, potentially leading to a decrease in both pigeons and parakeets over time.

The Story of Bobby Cummines – Highbury's Bank Robber

Sarah Potter

Joel Budd's recent book *Underdogs – The Truth About Britain's White Working Class* (Picador, 2025) has attracted much attention because of the Brexit vote. One of its chapters discusses the world of the armed robbers between the 1970s and the 1990s, after which this crime declined due to better security and policing.

Budd suggests that the rise and fall of the armed robber acts as a barometer of change in the white working class, especially in London. At the same time, a number of people from the working class also became well known as writers, for example John Osborne, and there were also the photographer David Bailey and the hairdresser Vidal Sassoon. Armed robbers, however, almost invariably failed to achieve financial success. In his autobiography, John McVicar estimat-



ed he would have doubled his income by working in honest labour rather than robbing banks and serving time in prison.

One of these armed robbers, Bobby Cummines, operated in Highbury in the 1970s. His territory went from Highbury Corner to Archway, Finsbury Park and the Caledonian Road. According to Joel Budd, he was for

a time one of the most feared men in London. In 2014, he published his autobiography, “I am not a Gangster”, giving an account of his criminal career. He soon discovered that violence paid when dealing with the school bully and he acquired his first gun at the age of fourteen. He relates how, during a long prison sentence, he studied for an Open University degree, resolving to go straight after he left prison. He worked at a charity called Unlock, run by ex-offenders for ex-offenders, and was awarded an OBE in 2011 for his work in penal reform.

By this time, the international criminal trade in drugs had replaced robbing banks. Cummines was convinced that armed robbery was over as a criminal career, and despised the few former armed robbers who became drug traffickers.

How have we changed as a society over the last 40 years?

Gill Shepherd



Introduction

The National Centre for Social Research produces an annual series of reports known as 'British Social Attitudes' which tell us a lot about the direction in which our society is travelling. These reports are based on large, statistically valid samples. A couple of years ago the Centre commissioned Sir John Curtice to produce a 40-year overview both of the perceived role of the state, and of public opinion, entitled 'Secular or cyclical? 40 years of tracking public opinion'. It makes fascinating reading and is very briefly summarised here.

The Role of the State in Society

The state plays a contentious role in economic management and moral guidance within society, both veering between reducing inequality, and prioritising economic growth, and acting as a moral compass, influencing societal norms and acceptable behaviour.

Public Opinion

Because public opinion on these roles has evolved significantly over the past 40 years, it is important that the state keeps abreast of those opinions.

- ★ **Sexual and reproductive behaviour**
Britain has become much more liberal

regarding sexual and reproductive behaviour over the last four decades. Attitudes towards same-sex relationships have shifted dramatically; support for premarital sex has increased, and abortion attitudes have liberalized.

- ★ **Evolving Gender Roles and Family Dynamics** Gender roles within families have transformed, reflecting increased female participation in the workforce. Concerns about work-life balance persist, and attitudes towards shared parental leave are supportive. Nevertheless, despite changing attitudes, women still perform a disproportionate share of domestic labour.
- ★ **Trends in Authoritarian and Libertarian Values** Public values in Britain have shifted towards a more liberal stance over the past 40 years, with a trend towards liberalism more pronounced since the mid-2010s.

Public expectations of government roles have fluctuated too, particularly in response to economic crises.

- ★ There is broad support for government intervention in healthcare and pensions, but less for unemployment support, though there have been increased calls for action on inequality since COVID.
- ★ Support for welfare benefits declined in the 1990s and 2000s but has recently rebounded and is observed across political affiliations.

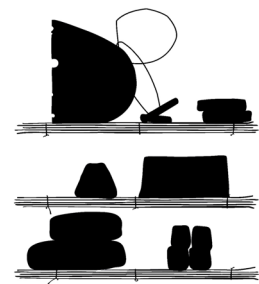
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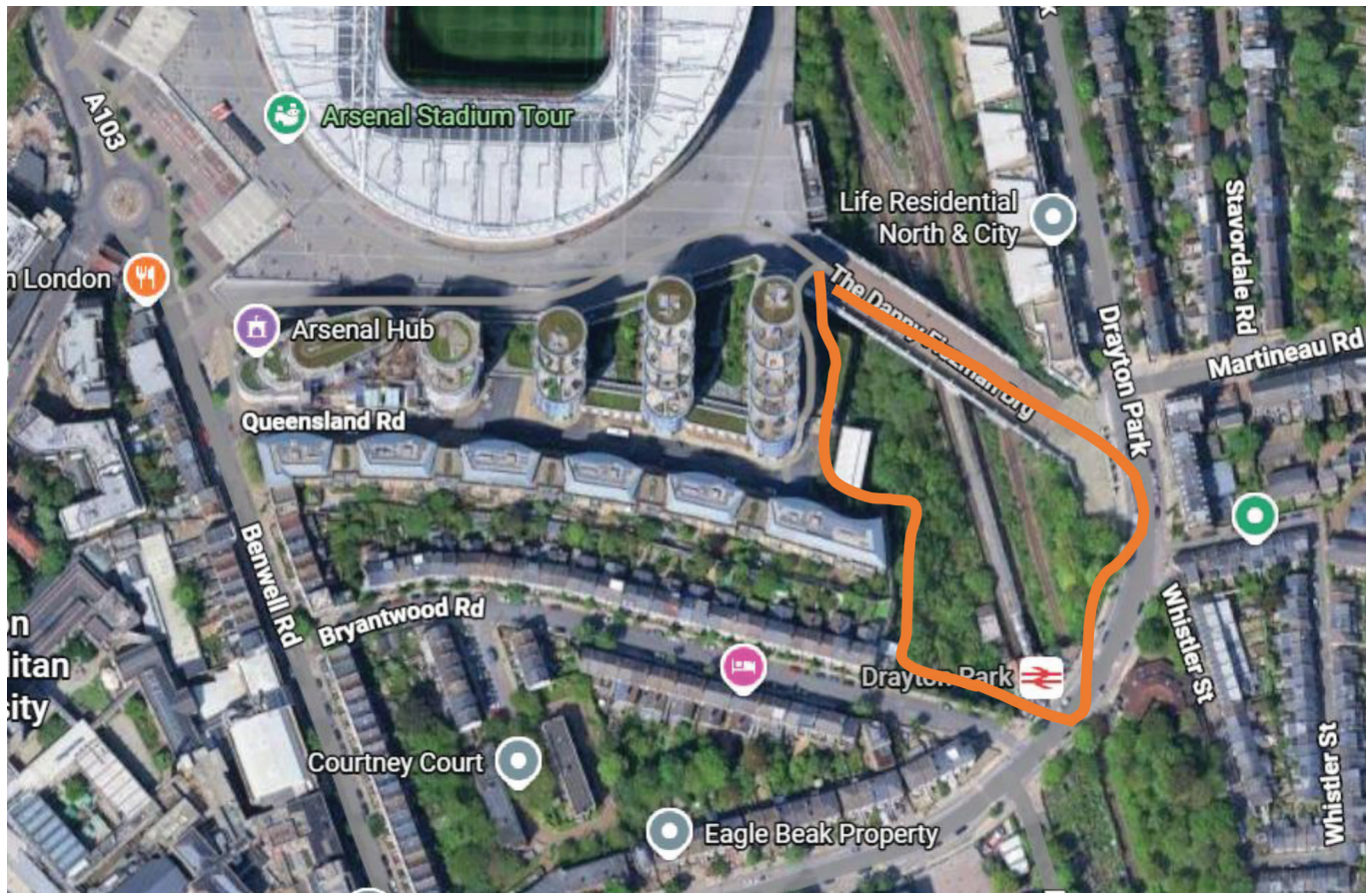
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that we have a Facebook page
facebook.com/highburycommunity
where a lot of local businesses advertise

We also have a website
highburycommunity.org

Proposed residential development adjacent to Drayton Park Station

Gill Shepherd



Project Overview

Innova Partnership, a collaboration between Network Rail and IJM, will submit a planning application to Islington Borough Council, focussing on affordable housing and community benefits. The site, a former railway depot, aims to deliver new homes and 1,000,000 sq. ft of commercial space. The proposed development includes up to 300 new homes, enhanced public spaces, and community facilities like cafés and workspaces.

The site is designated as a Borough Level Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, despite its ecological challenges. The design will respect local character, integrate biodiversity strategies, and address event-day impacts from the nearby stadium. Landscaping will focus on creating

accessible green spaces, improving air quality, and managing rainwater effectively.

An updated proposal will be shared in Winter 2025, with plans to submit the application soon afterwards.

Local responses

Residents in the immediate vicinity of the site have made the following points, and highlighted several major concerns. While they acknowledge the need for housing, they suggest that current plans raise serious issues regarding UK planning regulations and local policies. These include noise pollution, loss of light for nearby homes, overdevelopment, inadequate transport infrastructure, and environmental impact on green space and biodiversity.

Consequently they have put the following requests to Innova and to Islington Council:

- ★ Concrete commitments to support and improve local transport and active travel infrastructure.
- ★ Comprehensive assessments of noise, daylight/sunlight, transport impact, and ecology to be completed and published.
- ★ Strict enforcement of construction noise limits.
- ★ Revision of the building design to minimize overshadowing and respect the local area's character.
- ★ Robust strategies to protect and enhance local biodiversity, including ongoing ecological monitoring.
- ★ They conclude by urging the developer and council to address these issues and re-engage with the community before moving forward.

In loving memory of Derek Whitehead

3/9/1932 – 21/7/2025

Derek Whitehead was the longtime partner of David Fenton, a stalwart of the HCA Committee for many years. Derek was a strong background supporter of the Association, donating some of his paintings to be raffled at AGMs to raise funds, and cooking delicious savouries to be eaten at those events, too.

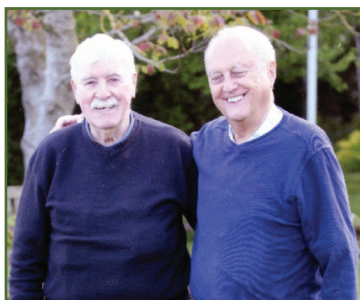
Derek had grown up in Oldham, and trained as an architect in Bristol. He and David met, in Victoria railway station in 1969, both waiting for



other people who failed to turn up. David was 29 and Derek was 37. They began to live together shortly afterwards, initially in a flat in Green Lanes, and were with one another for the next 55 years.

David's career in the travel industry largely dictated where they lived. His work based him initially in Leeds, then Bradford and then Leicester. Subsequently they lived in Vienna for a while where Derek learned to speak good German, and they also spent a year in Greece. Derek, as a freelance architect, moved with David from place to place and was always easily able to generate architectural work for himself wherever they lived.

They first made their acquaintance with France in the 1970s visiting friends, and in due course bought a house there, near Toulouse. They owned it for 40 years, spending at least 3 months there every year, and becoming profoundly integrated into local life, even running French classes for local expats at the University of Tours one summer. They sold up just before lockdown and thereafter lived fulltime in their Highbury home in Coach House Mews.



Derek's health began to fail in early 2025, after a fall, and his health continued to deteriorate until his death in July. He basically simply died of old age.

Both Derek and David had a great gift for friendship with others, but it was based ultimately on their own profoundly solid relationship. As David said, 'Once we met, we were never parted.'

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HCA News

Issue 136

October 2025

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Editor Gill Shepherd

Layout: Angela Stewart-Park

Published by the HCA