



Tree Report

Ria Higgins

Does the early morning song of a robin or a blackbird ever catch your ear? Or maybe, a bunch of chirpy cheeky blue-tits looking for insects on a nearby tree? As we all know, we benefit so much from having trees; our birds do, too.

With that in mind, the nationwide Trees for Streets campaign encouraging individuals, groups and businesses to sponsor a new tree, is proving to be a big success. Last year, 1,700 were sponsored, double the number the year before. They cost £295 each; £195 if you water them yourself. Islington Council is fully behind it and the Canonbury Society has now sponsored two trees. The first, a *Nyssa Sylvatica*, was planted on Canonbury Place, and turns striking shades of yellow, orange and red in the autumn. We excitedly wait to hear what species our second tree will be.

The Canonbury Society tree team works to safeguard trees and encourage appreciation of them, as well as promoting the planting of trees. We review and monitor applications for tree work in the conservation area where many trees, including those in rear gardens, are protected by a tree preservation order (TPO).

Last, but not least, we would like to say a huge thank you to Gavin Rees who has been protecting trees for 20 years. He was a member of the Islington Council tree team for six years before moving recently to a new position closer to his home. Gavin is passionate and hugely knowledgeable about trees and was always happy to give the Canonbury Society tree team great advice.

Treesforstreets.org/islington



The Canonbury Society sponsored the planting of a tree in Canonbury Place.



Minesh, Dipali, Falguni and Sunil Amin.

SHRIJI NEWS: THE 'HEARTBEAT OF CANONBURY'S COMMUNITY'

Ria Higgins and Ursula Yates

Cricket fans Sunil and Minesh Amin, and their wives Falguni and Dipali, hold a special place in the Canonbury community. Their shop, Shriji News, has provided newspapers and periodicals, as well as fruit, vegetables and a host of items from stationery to Indian sandalwood soap, for nearly three decades.

'The Amin families seem to know everyone without being nosy. They are always welcoming, invariably helpful, thoughtful and above all kind,' said Sir John Tusa, a BBC legend and arts administrator, expressing a view widely held amongst Shriji clients. 'We can even agree or disagree about cricket without rancour.'

The family have kept up ties with the state of Gujarat in the west of India, which they left to carve out a new life in 1990, returning from Canonbury to attend weddings, cricket matches and climb the snow-peaked Himalayan ranges.

Today, the Amins, who acquired the Canonbury Place lease in 1995, are flourishing: Sunil and Falguni's son is married and works as an aeronautical engineer and their

daughter is a doctor of science and about to get married. Minesh and Dipali's son has an MA in finance and their daughter is studying law – they both won scholarships to attend North Bridge House. They all attended William Tyndale school.

During the Covid pandemic, Shriji News became a vital lifeline for Canonbury residents. The Amins were making deliveries to 60 households. 'We just wanted to do whatever we could,' says Falguni, 'Even if it was a pint of milk, we were happy to deliver it.'

With normal life came the resumption of the 5am newspaper deliveries (coordinated by the 'early bird' Sunil) and usual business with locals popping in for essentials and anything from a lottery ticket to a bottle of Chablis. 'Is there anything essential that they don't stock?' asks John Tusa.

The LTN traffic reduction scheme and the Sainsbury's Local has hit Shriji's passing trade, but North Bridge House school and the armies of builders, with an appetite for snacks and energy drinks, have brought new customers. Rent increases have also impacted Shriji News' margins so a heartfelt plea: whenever you can, shop local at our precious Shriji corner shop.

Our parents were horrified!

Joan Dannatt, as told to her son, Adrian

It was an absolute slum! With my husband, the architect Trevor Dannatt, we discovered Canonbury when we went to a play at the Tower Theatre in March 1954 and then took a stroll afterwards; we contacted the local estate agent Mr Reese and came the next weekend, we saw four houses that Saturday and nearly bought one in Canonbury Square. Our whole street, St Mary's Grove, was full of very big houses which had suffered bomb damage and total neglect, all divided up amongst many tenants.

The semi-detached house we chose was one of the smallest, divided into three flats, it had been on the market for four years; there was an old boy on the top floor who spent his last years creating a concrete village in the back garden, he'd made everything to the smallest detail, a sign of 'Hovis for Tea', and even a little blue light above a police station. The village was in a terrible state so we spent weeks dismantling it, but in the old Elizabethan garden wall we kept finding traces of his sculptures, one a cat face with whiskers.

We bought the house in 1955 and then starting from around 1960 most of the street was demolished and replaced by low Neo-Georgian housing, so we went from being the neighbourhood's smallest house to one of the biggest. The developers couldn't get rid of the elderly sitting tenant in the basement of the big house opposite who would shuffle up and down the road with his string shopping bag. One Christmas, I left a festive dinner-for-one on his doorstep, complete with a small bottle of wine, but sadly on Boxing Day an ambulance took him away and shortly after that the house was demolished.

Bringing the whole street down was terrible, with so much noise and dust and rats making straight for our house; our daughter Clare was three and in her high chair in the kitchen when a rat scuttled in



Top: Joan hanging out the washing.

Above: Adrian toddling along St Mary's Grove in the early 1960s.



Clare in her Siver Cross pram. Babies routinely took their naps outside, often in the front garden!



St Mary's Grove in the bitter winter of 1962-63, Joan describes Canonbury in the snow as looking like 'an 18th-century village'.

causing her to scream terribly. We were completely infested, but luckily in those days there were still very efficient rat catchers. Everything was covered in the thick grey dust of demolition, we could see exposed staircases filled with cans and newspapers and rubbish. It was a genuinely rough, poverty-stricken area, the police were always being called out, and officers used to go down St Mary's Grove after dusk in twos!

Trevor's family were chartered surveyors in Blackheath and were horrified. None of the family wanted us to live here, and my family up in Highgate lent us the money reluctantly. Our well-heeled friends were very nervous about accepting our dinner invitations. I suppose we really were in the first wave of what they now call 'gentrification'; Basil Spence, the architect behind Coventry Cathedral, moved to Canonbury Place the year after us, and there were other architects like Gordon Wigglesworth, Jane Fior and her husband Robin, the graphic designer, the Keynes family, a delightful

live here, and my family up in Highgate lent us the money reluctantly. Our well-heeled friends were very nervous about accepting our dinner invitations. I suppose we really were in the first wave of what they now call 'gentrification'; Basil Spence, the architect behind Coventry Cathedral, moved to Canonbury Place the year after us, and there were other architects like Gordon Wigglesworth, Jane Fior and her husband Robin, the graphic designer, the Keynes family, a delightful

social circle and we all became close friends. At that time, for every house done up by its owners, the estate agent would decorate the house next to it, paying for the external painting, just the front, so it looked as if the area had come up twice as fast.

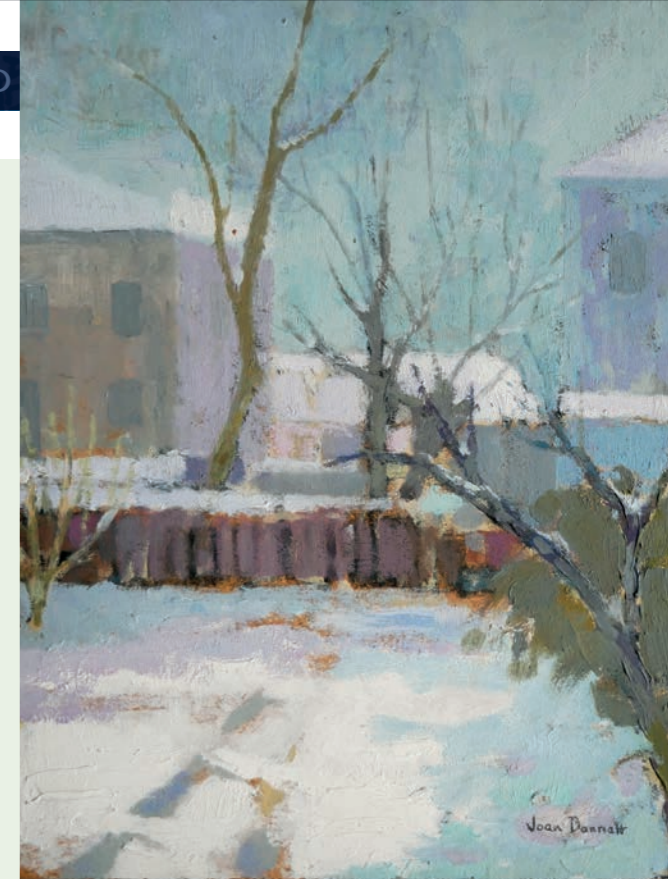
Trevor did some work on the house, especially the kitchen and garden paving. He designed the chimney pieces using an old Italian marble company up the Holloway Road who mostly made grave-stones. The next-door house was still divided up, on the top floor was an ancient mother with two daughters who both worked in a spinning factory. It next became a single-family house with the arrival of Mr Shand who was in the wine trade, then a doctor moved in, then a man from the council who went to prison, then the Potters, and even the head of BP David Simon, who became Baron Simon of Highbury, and now the Sykes - very different indeed to our original neighbours!

Living in the basement on the other side was the Huntley family who we were very close with, he was the local window cleaner and they looked after Clare when I went back to work as an Art Advisor and Buyer at the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson. Later, with a few other Canonbury mothers I started a play group at the back of the Union Chapel which lasted many years.

Dr Cranitch was the wonderful local GP, who had his surgery in Canonbury Square. There was no appointment system, you had to tear off a numbered ticket by the door and wait your turn. The doctor was a wonderful home visitor with his old-fashioned leather briefcase; he was a much-loved figure from the Irish Catholic community, with many children and when his wife tragically died in a flu epidemic the community would deliver a meal every evening for the whole family.

When our son Adrian was born the doctor would visit every day and Clare, aged five, would open the door wearing a nurse's uniform. Adrian was born at home here in the house, in the sitting room, with a wonderful midwife who then went on to deliver the children of Lukas Heller, busy at the time writing *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*

The winter after Adrian was born there was an incredible deluge of snow, one of the biggest winters on record, with so much snow Canonbury looked like an 18th century village again. We kept him in his pram, even in the house, the only place to keep him warm, and he was very knock-kneed when he finally emerged! Back then what was called a 'pea souper fog' would descend, engulfing the area making it almost impossible to see anything. People would walk hesitantly along the pavement with torches, hanging on to the railings, it was very dangerous. Before coal was banned we would have a delivery once a year through the coal chute at the side of the house. Of course



A painting of the back garden by Joan.

there was no central heating, we had two Pither Stoves and electric bar fires. Yes, we were tough!

The neighbourhood was alive with travelling tradesmen, including onion men on bicycles coming over from France and knife sharpeners. The row of shops on Canonbury Place included Wrights Stores, where items could be bought 'on the tab', the greengrocer Mr Crudgington and next to him a grocer Mr Woolnough. Later, there was an antique shop set up by Dan Klein and of course the newsagents Ron and Gladys Newton, eventually replaced by the charming Amin family. I would order a weekly Selfridges delivery, a huge van with fog lamps, bringing everything from baby vests and garden spades to clear the snow to Santos coffee beans and other tasty treats. At the time, Canonbury seemed a very long way indeed from Selfridges, an exotic distant outpost, an entirely different world. We are so grateful that a visit to see the play *The Moon In the Yellow River* led us to live in this unique and wonderful place.



Vase of Flowers by Pasquarosa Marcelli c. 1916.

PASQUAROSA: FROM MUSE TO PAINTER

Ria Higgins

You can tell when an artist is obsessed with colour because they want it to leap off the page. They want every colour to sing, every shade to dance. The Italian artist Pasquarosa Marcelli is one such artist and she captures this perfectly in a small vase of flowers (pictured) using deep purple, forest green and bold dashes of candy pink, crimson and buttery yellow. The oils are creamy, rich and delicious.

Born in Italy in 1896, Pasquarosa is relatively unknown here, but she deserves far more acclaim because she managed to do something quite extraordinary for any female artist of her time. In 1929, at the age of 33, she had an exhibition in Mayfair. The Italian ambassador opened it and the critics loved

it. Her story is even more extraordinary when you learn she came from a poor family, started out as a model for several artists, fell in love with one of them, and then, without any formal training, became a painter herself. Hollywood would love it.

Now, nearly a hundred years later, the Estorick Collection in Canonbury Square is holding a retrospective of her work. It features over 50 paintings and drawings, and it is clear from the start that she found no greater pleasure than capturing colour-filled scenes from her home life. A sewing basket, a teapot, a jug of wine; rugs, books, mirrors and unopened letters. Simple objects fill the canvas. Flowers do, too. Like many great artists, she saw beauty in everything.

The exhibition runs at the Estorick until April 28, 2024.

Futurists and aperitivos in the heart of Canonbury

The Estorick Collection is known internationally for its core of Futurist works, as well as figurative art and sculpture dating from 1890 to the 1950s. Futurists Umberto Boccioni, Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini are represented alongside other well-known artists such as Giorgio de Chirico, Amedeo Modigliani and Giorgio Morandi.

The Eric and Salome Estorick Foundation was established in 1994. The Estoricks' son Michael suggested buying Northampton Lodge in Canonbury Square to house their Collection. The gallery opened in 1998. Today, the museum comprises six galleries over three floors plus a café and bookshop. Roberta Cremoncini joined the Estorick as assistant curator in 1997, and became director in 2001.

The Estorick Foundation is a charity and has no regular public funding. Income from admission ticket sales and memberships is vital to the museum. Memberships range from £20 a year for individuals

to life membership of £500. The Collection welcomes volunteers and provides training in gallery work, the Collection's history and its artwork.

Alongside the permanent exhibition and special exhibitions there is the Caffè Estorick serving Italian coffee, cakes, wine and lunches from Wednesday to Sunday. On Thursdays the café opens until 8pm and during the summer months you can enjoy an authentic aperitivo in the evening sunshine.

The museum runs Family Art Days and also special workshops for children in the holidays. There is a free Family Trail to help explore the galleries and on the last Friday of the month there is a special play area for Under 5s.

The Collection is open from Wednesday to Sunday. For further information go to www.estorickcollection.com



Bust of Woman in bronze by Giacomo Manzù, 1952. Estorick Collection.

CANONBURY FEEDERS BOOST SMALL BIRD NUMBERS

Susan Millership and John Stewart

Are you an ornithologist, a twitcher or just a bird lover who looks out of the window and points out the LBJs (little brown jobs)?

Whatever your degree of expertise, the good news is that you will see more tits in your garden this year because they are one of



Blue Tit numbers are up 14 per cent from 1979.

the few species in Britain that is on the rise, and this is due to more people feeding them in the winter months and putting up bird boxes.

Below are a few of our favourite winter birds.

Blue Tits are feisty and colourful. You'll often see them dangling off feeders. They have very short, thin black beaks. Watch out for:

- Blue Tits like nest boxes, so in spring keep an eye out for chicks
- Domestic cats are a major cause of mortality.

Great Tits are similar in plumage to the Blue Tit but they have a black cap, throat, and stripe down their chest to their tail. They are aggressive feeders and their numbers are up 54 per cent from 1979:

- Males have a thick line down their belly, females have a fainter line
- Their long thin beaks are thought to have evolved very fast to access food in feeders.

Long-Tailed Tits have black/white/pinkish colouring. They gather in lively flocks of around 20 birds and twitter to one another.

- Their dome-shaped nests consist of moss, lichen, spiders' webs and feathers
- Females lay 6–14 peanut-sized eggs. Only 20 per cent of nests are successful. Pairs may help another couple if their nest fails.



Long-tailed tits only recently started using bird feeders. Numbers are up 79 per cent in the last 25 years.

All three love garden feeders. So, to help boost small bird numbers, buy feeders, fill them up and let the show begin!

Visit www.vinthousefarm.co.uk for bird food and feeders. They donate to the British Trust for Ornithology.

Charities 2024

Rosemary J Brown

Islington Giving raises funds for local projects working to reduce loneliness, increase opportunities and build connections. Fostering ways of connecting people and their communities to create change, much of their work involves resident-led panels who decide how to distribute funding. islingtongiving.org.uk

The Friends of the Rose Bowl (FORB) supports the Rose Bowl Youth Centre, one of the few local youth services engaging more young people than in pre-pandemic times. FORB funds outward-bound residencies, podcasts and sleep-overs as well as counselling, careers advice, a food bank and family support. You can arrange a visit at info@friendsoftherosebowl.org.uk / friendsoftherosebowl.org.uk

The Manna at St Stephen's Church welcomes homeless and marginalised people three days a week for showers, laundry, clothing, food,

internet access, a mailing address, and storage in a setting that encourages them to contribute their talents. Donations of men's clothes, books, phone chargers and carrier bags are appreciated. Volunteers are welcome. Email themanna@ststephenscanonbury.org.uk

The Margins Project at Union Chapel supports those experiencing homelessness and other crises by providing nutritious meals to over 70 people twice a week, advice and service referrals, as well as access to showers and laundry. Paid catering training is offered. unionchapel.org.uk/projects/margins



An Islington Giving consultation session.

Local plant sales

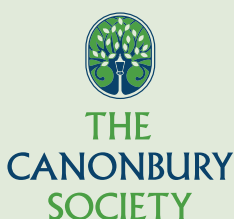
Islington Gardeners' sale is on Sunday 28 April at 2pm at the Olden Community Garden, N5 1NH: Islingtongardeners.org.uk

De Beauvoir Gardeners' sale is on Sunday 12 May from 11–12.30pm outside 21 Northchurch Terrace N1 4EB: debeauvoirgardeners.wordpress.com/

SUMMER PARTY
The Society is planning to have its annual Summer Garden Party in early July. We will send out further information nearer the time.

JOINING THE SOCIETY, AND PAYMENT OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

To download a membership form, visit the Canonbury Society's website. Benefits include invites to our Summer and Winter parties and the AGM. The annual subscription is £3.00, but further donations are welcome.



53rd AGM 2024

Join us on 23 May at 7pm at The Canonbury Tavern. There will be a guest speaker. You are warmly invited to stay on for a drink, have a chat and meet some new neighbours.

Committee Members 2024

Philip Walker: Chairman
Gilly Angell: Traffic
Rosemary Brown: Trees, Events, Newsletter, Membership
James Coates: Planning, Traffic
Rachael Henry: Safer Neighbourhoods
Ria Higgins: Trees, Events, Newsletter
David Ireland: Events

Jack Lambert: Planning
Susan Millership: Newsletter Editor, Traffic, Events
Judith Parker: Traffic, Trees
Sharon White: Treasurer, Membership
Ursula Yates: Secretary, Events, Newsletter
Co-opted members: Rebecca Taylor, Sarah Ross Goobey, Beatrix Payne