



THE WELSH HORROR WRITER DRAWN TO CANONBURY'S DARK CORNERS

Adrian Dannatt

'A favourite region of mine, which I have always regarded as sacred to grey Sunday afternoons and gloomy, bitter weather: Islington, Canonbury and parts thereto adjacent.' Thus wrote Arthur Machen whose ghost, for we the occult cognoscenti, still haunts the obscurer byways of our parish.

Machen (1863–1947) was one of the most famous authors to write specifically about our clandestine enclave. Machen is perhaps best remembered today for creating the myth of the bowmen of Mons during that World War One battle, a 'filler' piece for *The Evening News* which turned into established urban legend*. Machen has long been lauded whilst forgotten, his cult status reflected by such diverse fans as Barry Humphries, Guillermo del Toro, Alan Moore and even Bob Dylan whose very first tweet on X was about trying to find a copy of Machen's Symbolist classic *The Great God Pan*.

Machen was utterly Welsh, born in Caerleon-on-Usk, but divided his imaginative domain between the dark woods of his native Gwent and the sprawling mysteries of the modern metropolis. Stranger still, though Machen never lived in Islington (the closest he came being 36 Great Russell

Street) it was one of his favourite places to set his characters to wander, oft at dead of night, fog-bound, lost, and rarely without some sense of dread and revelation at the strange miracles lurking 'in a miserable back street in Islington or Barnsbury, or some such Godforsaken place ...'

Machen wrote often and well about what he termed 'The Islington Mystery', describing the Lloyd Baker estate and its Welsh dairies and memorably conjuring up a mystic version of Stoke Newington in his novella *N*. But nor did he overlook our own distinctive streets, most notably in the story *Opening the Door* from 1931 about a cleric who 'lived retired in a misty, 1830–40 square in the recesses of Canonbury... Thus he became the "Canonbury Clergyman."'

Machen first started exploring Canonbury at the beginning of the 20th century when it was still a relatively prosperous suburb, but came to really relish its decayed grandeur in the latter half of his life when it must have been truly spectacularly seedy and sinister, a lost domain of eccentric and genteel poverty; in fact the year Machen died, 1947, was when the poet Louis MacNeice moved here, in what might be cast as the very first faint stirrings of gentrification.



Arthur Machen c. 1900.

Suitably enough it was at a meeting of The Friends of Arthur Machen (FoAM) in Hay-on-Wye that the comedian Stewart Lee revealed yet another Welsh horror and ghost writer with strong local ties; namely Richard Ellis-Roberts whose family were originally from Aberystwyth before moving to 21 Alwyne Road and then 10 Willow Bridge Road where he himself was born in 1879. That two of the great late 19th century Welsh supernatural writers should have been so linked to the arcana of Canonbury is surely cause for celebration, *dathliad* indeed.

**In the article Machen imagined being a British soldier at the Battle of Mons calling on St George to save them from the Germans. The phantom bowmen from Agincourt duly appeared to fight off the Germans.*

Canonbury Teenager Makes Waves

Susan Millership

Enduring winter morning training on icy waters and balancing his schoolwork with his sport, teenager Milo is one of the UK's most successful competitive youth windsurfers.

Milo, 15, first learned to sail as a youngster, and he moved to competitive windsurfing about three years ago. In 2025, he won three UK national youth windsurfing titles, and he finished as the top British sailor in his Techno 293 fleet at the World Championships, the European Championships, the Italian Open, and the Greek Open.

In addition to Milo's freestyle, slalom, and wave sailing, he races in regattas on the Techno 293 One Design windsurf (the Youth Olympics windsurfing class). The next Youth Olympics Games are scheduled to take place in November 2026 in Dakar, Senegal.

Milo is part of the Royal Yachting Association's Talent Academy training programme focussed on the iQFoil (the adult Olympics windfoiling class). Windfoiling debuted as an Olympic event in 2024

Even in the depths of winter, Milo trains regularly, 'As I juggle my GCSEs this year, with my training for the 2026 racing season,



Milo windfoiling.

I would like to thank my sponsors, travel agents, drivers, and media managers, i.e. my parents!' said Milo. You can see him in action at: [instagram.com/milowindsurfs](https://www.instagram.com/milowindsurfs)

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Philip Walker



In such an uncertain world where breaking news seems simply to add to the gloom, it is a nice contrast to see the energy and enthusiasm going into the relaunch of Friends of the New River Walk.

The genesis of this launch was the disappointing revamp of the New River Walk in 2023 when excess silt was stored

in the newly installed revetments which narrowed significantly the width of the waterway, particularly in the historic Western section. As you will read on page 6, the new committee means business and is currently going through the rigours of becoming a charity, liaising positively with Islington Council and working closely with Groundwork, a social and environmental enterprise, to bring about significant improvements to this historic park.

We are privileged to live in Canonbury, a well located and beautiful area with many

fine buildings and trees and local shops which we are eager to nurture and protect. Let's not forget that the Society's central aim is to promote, safeguard and assist in the preservation of the Canonbury Conservation Area for the benefit of its inhabitants.

We held our annual Winter Drinks Party in the Union Chapel bar on 23 January. Again, it was a convivial and fun event. We plan to hold our Summer Garden Party in early July and hope you can join us and we look forward to welcoming current members as well as new ones.

PLANNING UPDATE

James Coates

The planning situation has improved slightly due to the Council's new planning portal which is easier to navigate. We are still frustrated that the Council no longer alerts us to new planning applications in the Canonbury Conservation Area. We rely on Canonbury Society members letting us know, planning notifications posted in the area, and information published in the *Islington Gazette*.

The Council have now produced their Climate Action Supplementary Document which provides detailed guidance on implementing local net-zero policies, focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and retrofitting. They have produced a guide to retrofitting homes (see links on this page).

We continue to press the Council to make the planning process for listed buildings easier by categorising certain works as permitted development (double glazing, heat pumps, solar panels on rear sloping roofs, possibly some kinds of insulation).

We continue to monitor the traffic around Highbury Corner. Recent figures show that the West Canonbury Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme (LTN), combined with the redevelopment of Highbury Corner has increased traffic on St Paul's Road by 15 per cent and that air pollution near the junction with Highbury Grove has risen. Bus journeys are taking longer due to the density of the traffic.

Useful Guidance on Retrofitting

Edwardes Square, Searsdale, and Abingdon Association (ESSA) has published comprehensive guides on retrofitting homes. *Part 2: Victorian House* is the most relevant to Canonbury: essaw8.com/resources

Islington Council provides advice and has published a Retrofit Handbook: islington.gov.uk/environment-and-energy/energy/energy-saving-guidance/retrofit

Digital Art Show Raises Money for MSF

Gill Hopkins

I liked to paint when on holiday, but it was often difficult to take the equipment needed. I saw some digital artwork and realised this would be a solution – no tubes, paper, brushes or water, just an iPad, an app and a stylus.

I mentioned my interest to the groups coordinator of the Islington University of the Third Age (iu3a). We set about forming an iPad art group and sought guidance from the coordinator of the Hampstead digital art group. After a few lessons, we were ready to experiment and launch our own group.

Our first meeting was in September 2019. Within a short time Covid struck, and we moved to meetings on Zoom, which proved to be an excellent way of viewing work, commenting and learning. It was also a valuable social lifeline. We still meet twice a month in members' homes in Canonbury – there are always more discoveries to make.

The group produces an amazing variety of work, and we decided that it would be fun to have an exhibition to share it with a wider audience. The Nourished Communities store on Upper Street welcomes the local community to use its downstairs space for exhibitions, lectures and other activities. They were happy to accommodate us, and we launched the exhibition on Thursday 25 November, 2025 coinciding with the iu3a's regular end-of-month lecture in St Mary's

Church. Nourished Communities generously helped out with the drinks reception on the opening night.

There are six of us in the group, three are Canonbury residents. We each chose five or six framed pictures to exhibit. All proceeds were donated to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The exhibition ran until 29 November and it was a great success. We made over £1,000 for MSF UK. Many thanks to Nourished Communities for their help and support.

Here is a link to a YouTube video of the opening evening where you can see the work of Patricia Biddiscombe, Henry Cleaver, Sara Meidan, Pauline Frost, Gill Hopkins and Marilyn Locke: youtu.be/1UCv2V9EV8



Samuel Phelps: One Time Giant of our Local Stage

David Ireland

For many of us, the plaque saying 'Samuel Phelps, Tragedian, Lived Here' will mean nothing. 'Tragedian' shortchanges him, for Phelps, who lived at 8 Canonbury Square from 1844–66, was far more than that: a highly versatile actor, a successful theatre manager in difficult times, and a people's champion.

As his biographer Shirley Allen notes, 'his name is almost forgotten today, yet in his own time critics ranked him with Garrick, Kemble, Kean and Macready [other leading actor/managers]'. From 1844 until 1862, he managed Sadler's Wells Theatre, his management, Allen adds, being 'one of the few successful of the Victorian period, surviving the years of economic depression known as the "hungry forties" and flourishing for two decades that saw the virtual disappearance of English drama from London theatres'.

Before Phelps took over, Sadler's Wells certainly needed rescuing. Charles Dickens described the theatre in the 1830s as 'a bear garden, resounding with foul language, oaths, catcall shrieks, yells, blasphemy, obscenity'. Phelps changed all that, putting on 31 Shakespeare plays. As an actor, he was a leading man like no other, playing Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, and King Henry IV, but also Bottom, Falstaff, and Christopher Sly. Another biographer, John Forbes-Robertson, suggested 'some have denied that he was a great actor' but of his 1844 Macbeth, the *Athenaeum* magazine reported, 'since Edmund Kean's we have seen nothing better for vigour and vivid effect'.

He won a good deal of local affection for respecting 'the purses of his spectators'. Allen relates that 'he kept the same prices even after the crowded houses of the first season indicated the appeal of his productions. The boxes were two shillings, the pit one shilling, and the gallery sixpence. At Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the Haymarket, the pit cost three shillings, and the boxes varied from five to seven.' At that early production of *Macbeth*, '1,200 thronged the gallery, a thousand more crowded the benches in the pit, even the boxes were filled to their capacity of 600'. Macbeth says "If we should fail", Lady M "We'll not fail". Here the audience broke into spontaneous cheers.'

Even though Phelps cleaned up Sadler's Well's act, there remained a certain sniffiness about both the acting profession, and the theatre in Islington. At an 1856 dinner, he recounted an anecdote about sending his youngest daughter to a private school in

Islington from which she was abruptly dismissed one day. 'Good God! I thought, what horrid crime can that little wretch have perpetrated?' Her mother had an interview with the school mistress, who explained: 'I have a gentleman who is an immediate neighbour of yours. He has threatened to remove his three daughters for he will not allow his children to be educated under the same roof with an actor's.'

As for Islington, the *Athenaeum* commented, 'nothing but the desperate nature of contemporary theatrical conditions could have driven these distinguished actors to such a locality', while *Punch* congratulated the actors for 'the zeal which has impelled them thus to consecrate a temple to the Drama in the remote waste of Islington'.



CANONBURY OPEN GARDENS BACK IN BLOOM

Sharon White

On Sunday 31 May, from 12:30–5:00pm, six Canonbury gardens will be open under the National Garden Scheme (NGS). A single entrance fee of £10 per person (children free) will give entry to all six gardens. The NGS has been funding nursing and health charities since 1927 and in 2025 it raised over £3.8million through its open gardens. The NGS fundraising relies primarily on income from open gardens. The donations have helped thousands of people living with cancer, Parkinson's, poor mental health and the pressures of unpaid caring, by supporting the nurses, health professionals and care workers who care for them.

As many Canonbury residents will remember, Jack and Liz Lambert opened their beautiful garden in Alwyne Road under the NGS and it was always a lovely opportunity to meet up with people from our local community, as well as from further afield, in addition to admiring the garden and eating delicious cakes. The Lamberts opened their garden for 27 years from 1992 to 2019 and raised thousands of pounds for the NGS. It is great to have filled the Canonbury gap in the NGS calendar this year!

This is a unique opportunity to visit six private gardens in leafy Canonbury. It is interesting to see what individual owners do to enjoy their space and

reflect their personalities. For example, one garden has bee hives (so avoid if allergic), another a topiary fish hedge, while another features beautiful espalier fruit trees.

Refreshments will be available in at least one of the gardens, and there will also be plants for sale. The open gardens are at 3 and 4B Alwyne Road, 10 and 19 Alwyne Villas, 29 Canonbury Grove and 48 Canonbury Park North. Further details are available on the NGS website: ngs.org.uk



VIVID MEMORIES OF CANONBURY

Jenny Watson-Bore, Events Organiser for Clerkenwell and Islington Guides Association

I was brought up in Highbury, but my family had Canonbury connections. My mother and father had met while dancing the Charleston at the Mornington Hall, which was on the corner of Tyndale Terrace and Canonbury Lane. In its day, Mornington Hall was a meeting place for Nonconformists, and later it served as the headquarters of the Arsenal Supporters' Club. It is now residential but is still distinguishable from the remainder of the terrace by its fenestration and the blocked brick arch on the ground floor.

In the 1950s, on spring and summer Saturday evenings, our family would go for a walk around Canonbury. It was particularly beautiful when blossom was on the trees. We would sometimes visit the Canonbury Tavern, where I was given a lemonade and an arrowroot biscuit in the garden, with its imposing trees. These were the very same trees under which George Orwell had sat, and the very same pub in which the Loyal Islington Volunteers had drunk, although of course I did not know that at the time. The Volunteers were a cavalry unit formed in 1797/98 to deal with the threat from revolutionary France, and later from Napoleon, and they stabled their horses close to what was to become the Mornington Hall.

In my childhood, Canonbury had many reminders of the Second World War. Compton Terrace had lost five houses in 1944. I used to go with my mother to pay the rent in Islington Council offices, and I remember run-down frontages and damaged pavements. My sister Coral married a local boy from Marquess Road in 1956. The houses where he grew up had long, damp, shady gardens and rabbits in cages.

I loved the New River Walk and as a ten-year-old I used to play on the rocks close to the water. I avidly read *Water for London* by Agnes Allen which was a 1938 historical novel about the development of the New River itself, commissioned by Sir Hugh Myddleton and completed in 1617. The New River Walk



Jenny aged 6 and 21.

was opened in 1954 by Herbert Morrison, at various times Leader of London County Council and Minister of Transport, and the grandfather of Peter Mandelson.

Even in the 1950s, Canonbury was more upmarket than Highbury, and as a teenager, I harboured an ambition to live on Canonbury Square (I still do). I pictured myself gazing from the top windows of my imaginary house towards the City of London. I was aware that famous people from the arts lived in the area and indeed I once came face to face with the actor Tom Courtenay. Judith Chalmers the television presenter lived nearby, and Sir Basil Spence, the architect of Coventry Cathedral, lived at 1 Canonbury Place. In 1962, we were all asked to watch the consecration of the cathedral on television in the school hall.

Another local resident was Dame Flora Robson, who lived in Alwyne Villas. She was a character actress who played Queen Elizabeth I in the 1937 film *Fire Over England* and also performed alongside Erroll Flynn in *The Sea Hawk* in 1940. She had a fearsome reputation, but my Aunt Ethel, who was Dame Flora's house cleaner, said that the Dame's bark was worse than her bite!

I saw performances by the Tower Theatre Company, and I had my first introduction to Shakespeare in the garden of Canonbury Tower. It was a riotous production of *Twelfth Night*, and some Islington children watched the performance over the wall in Canonbury Place.

I remember the great freeze of 1962/63 when I witnessed a blood-red sun setting behind the Tower. Later, as sixth formers at Barnsbury Girls' School, we visited Canonbury Tower; I was entranced by the view from the top and shocked by the fantastical story that Walter Raleigh had tried to shoot his son Wat in one of the panelled rooms.

When I was a young woman in the late sixties, I used to frequent the cluttered but efficient Canonbury Bookshop on Upper Street, and I remember meeting actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company in the Compton Arms. Writing this has awakened many fond memories from another time ...

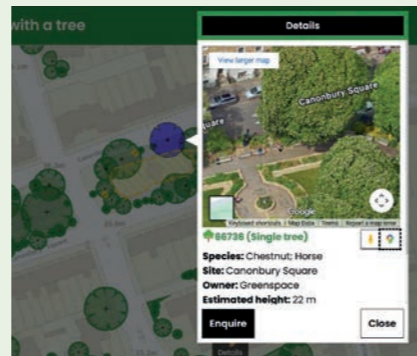
Putting Islington's Trees Back on the Map

James Robinson Tillet, Tree Planting and Engagement Manager at Islington Council

Albeit a compact and dense borough, Islington is rich with people and nature. Amidst the landscape our trees stand tall, as the borough's largest living assets, resilient and diverse, with a quite remarkable history – but where are these icons of the borough?

Like us, trees have entered a digital age after being uploaded to Islington's website and what better way to celebrate these new, old or bygone trees in the 21st century than putting them back on the map! Through our live Tree Map you can browse over 46,000 records dating back over 10 years. This intuitive resource is designed for anyone wanting to investigate our data and get to know their local trees by name (or at least the species) – let's learn more!

What to do?



Go online and search 'Islington Tree Map' or put trees.islington.gov.uk/trees/map into the address bar. Once the tree map of the borough has loaded you can zoom in. There are multiple layers to pick from, including current trees, removed trees and potential places for trees. You can view their Eco Benefits impacts, estimated value and more – just search a location or click the GPS icon. Note that the Conservation Areas and tree preservation orders (TPOs) are not there yet!

Please do get involved and share your passion for trees, we would love to hear how much you appreciate your local tree – you can help test our enquiry system and share that passion! Furthermore, if you're keen to donate towards tree care in your area, search for 'How you can help trees in Islington' on the Council website: islington.gov.uk. Many thanks from the Tree Planting Engagement Team!

CHRISTMAS CHEER

Gilly Angell and Frances Sieber

On 25 December 1919, Evelyn Waugh, later a resident of Canonbury Square, wrote: 'A poor Christmas Day. Like birthdays, Christmas gets duller and duller.'

The 200 of us who gathered last December on a cold, starlit Monday night for the second year of Carols In The Square, would disagree with this sentiment. The Union Chapel Community Singers, conducted by Choir Master António Sá-Dantas, his baton twinkling with fairy lights, led us through old and new carols, teaching us *Christmas Bells Canon*, and ending with a riotous *Twelve Days of Christmas*, with accompanying movements.

In late 1946, George Orwell who lived in Canonbury Square remarked on post-war austerity, where items such as mistletoe were available, while basic traditional food items were scarce or excessively expensive: 'Britain has imported 7,000 crates of mistletoe from France ... half a turkey, three tangerines, and a bottle of whisky at not more than double the legal price.'



We were much more fortunate, as those arriving early were treated to mulled wine and mince pies whilst others brought hot drinks.

António is now leaving the Choir for pastures new, and we wish him every success. Many thanks to Caroline Grimshaw for designing the flyers, António Sá-Dantas and the Union Chapel Community Choir (ucssingers@gmail.com), the Trustees of Canonbury Square and for all who joined us. We hope to have even more people taking part in Carols In The Square this December.

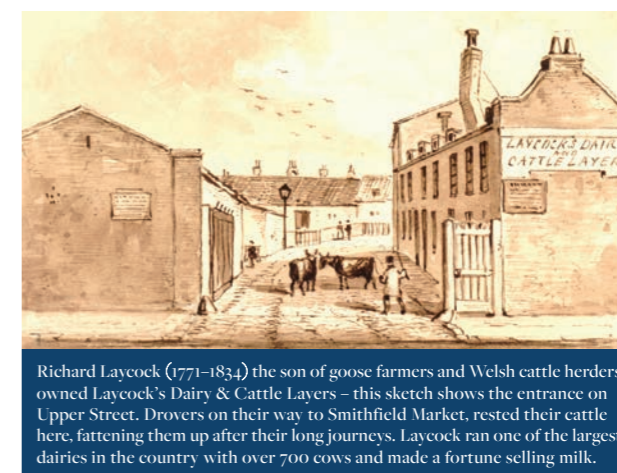
Canonbury Cambrians

Adrian Dannatt

My own love for Welsh horror writer Arthur Machen is indubitably linked to being part of a distinctive lost tribe, we who discreetly recognise each other with no more than a glint of leek in the eye, yes, the 'Canonbury Cambrian'. My membership is thanks to my very own mam, Joan Howell Davies, daughter of that fiery Cymru nationalist Hywl Davies of Carmarthen, she who moved here with my father back in 1955.

But just on our street, St Mary's Grove, is also to be found the redoubtable Tina Capel, whose venerable forebears moved here from their hillside farms, even with little shoes for their geese; her grandfather was the celebrated surgeon Robert Pugh Rowlands (1874-1933), who according to contemporaries 'was born a Welshman and died a Welshman, he himself confessed to thinking in Welsh while speaking English'. Tina has a rich fund of knowledge about local Welsh history, the manifold dairies around Islington, the largest being on Laycock Street, of whose many milkmaids with their 'scarcely intelligible language indicates Wales to be their native country'. Small wonder that both a daughter and granddaughter of Tina should have felt the lure of returning to the coast of their motherland.

Even Canonbury Tower has Welsh connections, its most famous resident the philosopher Francis Bacon being known for his taste in Welsh serving-men, living with the beloved young Henry Percy, his mother complaining of 'that bloody Percy' and 'his



Richard Laycock (1771-1834) the son of goose farmers and Welsh cattle herders owned Laycock's Dairy & Cattle Layers – this sketch shows the entrance on Upper Street. Drovers on their way to Smithfield Market, rested their cattle here, fattening them up after their long journeys. Laycock ran one of the largest dairies in the country with over 700 cows and made a fortune selling milk.

Welchmen one after another'. There is also a magnificent watercolour of *Canonbury House* at the Tate by Cornelius Varley, an artist eternally linked to his views of Wales, and recent repairs of the tower involved much Welsh Slate, sourced and delivered directly from deep within that land itself.

One might cite Gareth Morris the flautist (and brother of famous *Plaid Cymru* activist, historian and transgender pioneer Jan Morris) who lived at 4 Alwyne Place; nor should we forget the strong Evans clan of Canonbury, whether Stuart, whose own Welsh heritage is long lost in mists of runic legend or his altogether Welsh Preacher wife Margaret, née Evans also, and her sister Morfydd, as Welsh a name as Morgan Davies Bridal on Essex Road.

But the beating heart of Welsh Canonbury surely lies on Alwyne Place at the *plas* of Colwyn Philipps, Viscount St Davids and his wife Augusta, who moved to the neighbourhood in 1967 and in subsequent years lived between here and their political obligations back in Pembrokeshire. Indeed, Colwyn has even been termed the original

instigator of Welsh devolution and their son Roland, best known as the Blues musician Todd Sharpville, then spent a long decade living on the Pembrokeshire coast and his children speak the language.

With classic Celtic synchronicity their neighbour and close friend happened to be another extremely Welsh figure, namely actor and filmmaker Kenneth Griffith who lived at No. 8. Amazingly enough Griffith was actually a distant relative, an illegitimate descendant of the first Viscount St Davids (1860-1938); thus, he would dramatically declaim at the fabled Philipps garden parties, 'You, Colwyn went through the front door, but I myself through the *back* !'

And for all of us, this small band from the distant mountains and rocky coast, when overcome with *Hiraeth*, that uniquely Welsh word for homesickness and nostalgia, we are never quite sure if it is for our vanished homeland or for this unique and curious corner of North London.

**Cambria*, the name given to the ancient Roman province of the country now known as Wales.



The view towards the City from the Tower in 2008.

FRIENDS OF THE NEW RIVER WALK BACK IN ACTION!

With support from the Canonbury Society and Friends of Canonbury Square, a group of Canonbury residents came together in January 2025 to re-energise the Friends of the New River Walk (FNRW).

FNRW was formed in 1994 and, under the leadership of architect and local resident, Jack Lambert, played a central role in the 1998 restoration. In addition to reviving a green corridor in the heart of Canonbury, the renovation brought to light the historic significance of part of the waterway as the only original New River channel in North London in terms of layout and puddled clay lining.

Taking forward this 30-year legacy of social, environmental and heritage activism, FNRW aim to collaborate with the London Borough of Islington (LBI) and other stakeholders to enhance and look after this historic, green-blue urban space. The group's values are threefold:

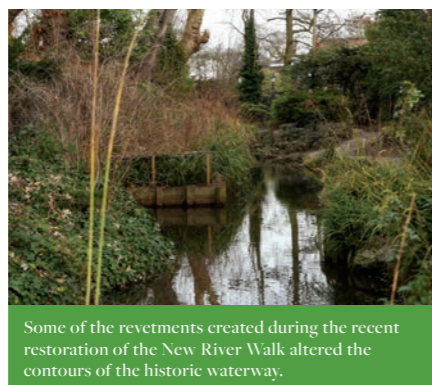
- **Community:** To encourage social interaction, cohesion and wellbeing in Canonbury, and beyond, through inclusive community-based activities and events.
- **Environment:** To facilitate and contribute to the care of the natural environment and biodiversity of the New River Walk (NRW), the heart and lungs of Canonbury.
- **Heritage:** To safeguard the cultural heritage and promote the significance of the NRW and its historic ties to the New River.

FNRW believe that removing the silt from the waterway is an important part of any long-term conservation strategy. While not opposed to the minor use of revetments to

prevent soil erosion and increase biodiversity, FNRW emphasise the importance of preserving the heritage value of the waterway and that any revetments should not substantially alter the contours of the waterway. Several of the revetments added during the 2023 restoration have had a negative impact on the waterway, and these require careful rectification.

In 2025, the Friends have been setting themselves up as a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) with the Charity Commission, contacting local councillors and LBI staff regarding effective ways for managing the park and reaching out to the broader Canonbury community, including residents of the Marquess Estate. FNRW activities included sponsoring aquatic plants, such as waterlilies, to contain the spread of duckweed, a summer photography competition, and a festive gardening session in December.

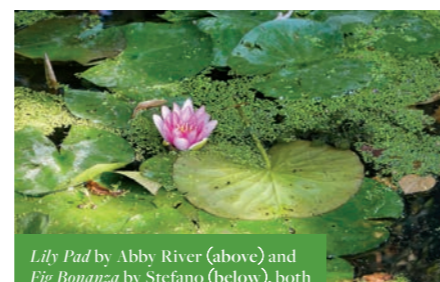
In 2026, the Friends will further collaborate with LBI and Groundwork, a social and environmental enterprise, to enhance the natural environment, historic significance



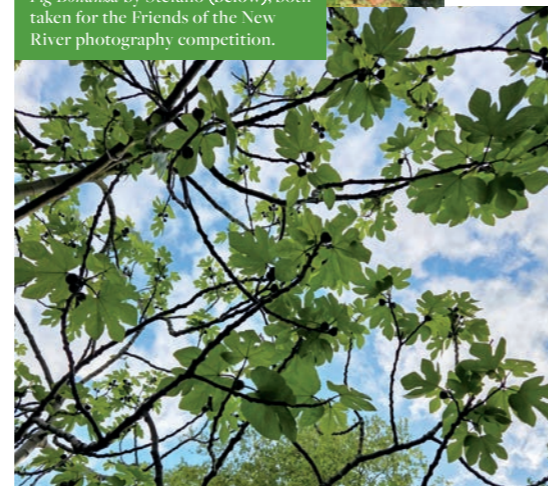
Some of the revetments created during the recent restoration of the New River Walk altered the contours of the historic waterway.

and social impact of this green-blue public asset. FNRW will also be exploring avenues towards a registration with Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

If you have any comments on the New River Walk, or issues please email: andrew.hillier@islington.gov.uk, lilybelle.marrion@islington.gov.uk and friends@fnrw.org.uk. Do get in touch by emailing friends@fnrw.org.uk if you would like to become involved. For more information visit fnrw.org.uk



Lily Pad by Abby River (above) and Fig Bonanza by Stefano (below), both taken for the Friends of the New River photography competition.



Local Charities 2026

Rosemary J Brown

Friends of the Rose Bowl channels vital funding to the Rose Bowl Youth Centre which provides a safe space for the disadvantaged from the ages of 8 to 21. Through activities that include play, crafts, sports, structured music learning, cooking, CV writing, interview preparation and life skills, the Rose Bowl aims to improve opportuni-



Rose Bowl youth workers: (l-r) Clive Tachie, Stacey Jeakins, Dawn Jarrett, Chantelle O'Marde and Termaine Green-Jones.

ties for local young people. One of the new initiatives this year helps to tackle emotionally based school avoidance. friendsoftherosebowl.org.uk; justgiving.com/charity/friendsoftherosebowl

The Manna at St Stephen's Church welcomes over 100 homeless and marginalised people three days a week for showers, laundry, clothing, food, internet access, a mailing address, and storage along with support from an advocacy worker and encouragement to 'put back in'. Activities include art, poetry, gardening and walking. Donations of men's clothes and phone chargers are appreciated. Volunteers are welcome. themannan.org.uk/contact-us

Islington Giving brings local people, businesses and charities together to tackle isolation, create opportunities and foster community connections. They believe



Islington Giving's 'We Make it Happen' community celebration event at Hargrave Hall.

everyone has something to give – be it time, skills, or money – and that when people come together great ideas can be turned into action. islingtongiving.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, an advice and engagement service, well-being activities and a supported employment programme. unionchapel.org.uk/projects/margins

Heritage Homes, Modern Comfort

Khuzema Hussein is an architect and Partner at Collective Works

Retrofitting in conservation areas like Canonbury is vital if we want this beautiful neighbourhood to thrive into the next century. A retrofit is more than a renovation. It's a targeted effort to improve a building's performance: reducing energy use, improving air quality, upgrading heating systems and insulation and more, without compromising its architectural integrity.

Historic buildings often underperform when it comes to energy efficiency. They can be cold, draughty and prone to damp. Yet these buildings were designed to 'breathe'. Traditional materials such as stone, brick, and timber alongside lime-based plasters allow moisture to pass naturally through the structure. Understanding this 'superpower' is key to improving their performance without causing damage.

If you are considering major renovations – a new extension, or you have taken on a project – there is real opportunity to include a deep retrofit within the scope. But what can you do if you want to upgrade the performance of your home without such major disruption?

A first step is identifying the retrofit opportunities of a property. Thermal imaging can show where heat is being lost, and a whole-house plan can be developed,



© Khuzema Hussein



© Khuzema Hussein

Collective Works is based at Leroy House on Essex Road.

often phased over time. Once the fabric of a property is performing well, the next step is to look at the potential benefits of renewable technology.

At Collective Works, with the help of research undertaken by the Architects Climate Action Network (ACAN) and our own experience, we have pinpointed some changes that deliver significant results:

- **Roof insulation** yields big improvements on performance. Pitched roof buildings should be insulated between the rafters. This can usually be done from the inside without the need for scaffolding. New tiles to a pitched roof can also become an

opportunity to add an additional layer of insulation on top of the rafters. Flat roofs, however, should be insulated from the outside to allow moisture to escape and avoid issues of condensation build-up.

- **External wall insulation** offers the best improvement to performance with the least impact on residents. In conservation areas, this may only be possible on rear and flank walls as the street facade needs to be preserved. Where external insulation is not an option, internal insulation can be added but this requires some disturbance. Care needs to be taken in the choice of insulation material, as trapped water vapour can result in mould.
- **Glass technology** has improved in the past decades. Double, triple and even multi-layered windows lose heat much less than their predecessors. Well-fitting windows and doors also reduce draughts. In the Canonbury Conservation Area planning permission is needed when installing double glazing.

- We recommend focusing on the building fabric – the outside walls and roof – before installing renewables. However, photovoltaic panels and an air source or ground source heat pump can be installed without massive intervention. These technologies can reduce the cost of utility bills and help with decarbonisation. Heat pumps typically perform better with underfloor heating, but they can still be connected to existing radiators.

Canonbury is already special. By combining technical knowledge with local insight, we can preserve what we love whilst preparing for the future. Living more sustainably and more comfortably is within everyone's reach! If you are interested in finding out more visit collectiveworks.net



The Best is Yet to Come

Sir John Tusa, Canonbury resident, BBC broadcasting legend and distinguished arts administrator, at the age of 90 has launched a new podcast, *The Best is Yet to Come*, in which he interviews prominent nonagenarians.

Tusa, a founder presenter of *Newsnight* and once managing director of the BBC World Service, said 'I wanted to talk to people in their nineties to hear about their thoughts, their lives. What an extraordinary gathering of knowledge, experience, wisdom and understanding.'

With his godson and now fellow podcaster Rory Stewart giving advice,



Sir John Tusa at the launch of his podcast.

Tusa's interviews include Michael Heseltine, Antonia Fraser, Penelope Lively and the architect Nick Thompson. 'We in our nineties have lived through a world war, the Cold War, the threat of nuclear annihilation, an economic crash, the arrival of the internet, the new world of social media and now the prospect of AI. What a ride.'

Friends of Canonbury Square

Beatrix Payne

Last year was busy for Friends of Canonbury Square (FoCS). We retained our Green Flag status as a well-maintained public space and we won, again, awards in both Islington In Bloom and London In Bloom competitions.

We ran two planting campaigns aimed at bringing climate change-resilient colour, and variety, to both sides of the gardens. Hopefully, in the West garden you will soon start to see Camellias coming into bloom with their white, pink and orange flowers. You should also expect some late summer colour from Verbena Bonariensis, various salvias, Chrysanthemums and other late flowering varieties. We were given some wonderful Pittosporum plants which will give texture in the shrubby areas. We also started building dead hedges, small barriers made of sticks and logs, to protect some of the bedding plants which are close to the walkways.

Our wonderful team of gate lockers kept up their regular daily duties, keeping the square safe at night and welcoming during

the day. The group was boosted by two new lockers who received training from Islington Council.

This small and busy urban green space serves as an important habitat for precious urban wildlife. We had ladybirds galore this year keeping away many of the aphids that plague the roses; we frequently saw pairs of cabbage white butterflies; a pair of thrushes were active in the Spring and were possibly nesting; Pipistrelle bats were frequently seen circulating under the horse chestnut trees at twilight on summer evenings; young foxes were spotted playing on the lawn and the gardeners were often accompanied by lively robins looking for insects and worms.

The FoCS's activities are all carried out by volunteers who, it is estimated, give a total of nearly 1,100 hours per year to care for the public spaces in Canonbury Square. We are grateful for the support of volunteers from Good Gym; our ever-supportive local councillor Nurullah Turan; Bhupesh, Fiona and Andrew of the LBI Green Space team; council sweepers Henry and Kenneth; Ari of Upper Street Hardware for expert advice, tools and help; The Place coffee shop who from time to time donate their waste coffee grounds to our leaf compost and local ice-cream shop Udderlicious who gave ice creams for the July gardening session.

FoCS relies on donations to fund its plant buying and maintenance of the historic phone box. After a busy year, we welcome any support. Please contact Beatrix Payne or Ian McVeigh for more information. friendsofcanonburysquare.org.uk

Safer Neighbourhoods

Rachael Henry

Quarterly Canonbury ward panel meetings allow residents to meet informally with councillors, the Safer Neighbourhood Team and Community Safety officers to discuss issues of concern and assist police in setting resourcing priorities. The next panel meeting is on Monday, 27 April 2026 from 6–7pm at the Rose Bowl, Ramsey Walk, N1 2PT. Information about future meeting dates and venues is available via telephone 020 7354 3524 or email: rosebowl@isledon.co.uk

Visit the Canonbury Society website for more information regarding crime prevention and Canonbury West Neighbourhood Watch.



Local plant sales

Islington Gardeners' sale is on Sunday 10

May at the Olden Community Garden, N5 1NH. islingtongardeners.org.uk

De Beauvoir Gardeners' Spring Plant Sale, Sunday 10 May from 11.30–1pm, outside 21 Northchurch Terrace N1 4EB. debeauvoirdgardeners.org/

Donated plants welcome (see websites).



SUMMER PARTY
The Society is planning to have its annual summer garden party on 5 July. We will send out further information nearer the time.

We are lucky to have enthusiastic volunteers of all ages.



© Rosemary J Brown (all)

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 minimum annual subscription is £3.00, but further donations are welcome.

Many of you will have paid your annual subscription when you purchased tickets for the Winter Party. If you haven't paid your subscription, please pay directly into the Society's bank account. See our website for details.

If you do not have access to the internet, please send a cheque written out to The Canonbury Society to The Hon Treasurer, 3 Alwyne Road, N1 2HH, along with your contact details.



THE CANONBURY SOCIETY

55th AGM

Join us at the Union Chapel on Tuesday 26 May at 7pm. 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 2026

Philip Walker: *Chairman*
Jack Lambert: *Planning*
David Ireland: *Events*
Gilly Angell: *Traffic*
James Coates: *Planning, Traffic*
Judith Parker: *Traffic, Trees*
Rachael Henry: *Safer Neighbourhoods*

Ria Higgins: *Trees*
Rosemary Brown: *Trees, Events*
Sharon White: *Treasurer, Membership*
Ursula Yates: *Secretary, Events*

Co-opted members

Susan Millership: *Newsletter Editor*
Sarah Ross Goobey, Beatrix Payne