

newsletter

of the CAMDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

No 278
Nov 2016

Filmed in Camden

Thurs 17 November, 7.30pm
Camden Local Studies, 2nd floor, Holborn Library,
32-38 Theobalds Road WC1

In November's talk, film buff Danny Nissim will be looking at some films shot on location in Camden in the decade after the Second World War. In Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man who knew too much* we see James Stewart tussling with a taxidermist in Camden Town. In the much-loved Ealing black comedy, *The Ladykillers* (1955), starring Alec Guinness, Cecil Parker, Peter Sellers and Jack Warner, we see how a house poised precariously next to the Copenhagen railway tunnel suddenly seems to shift location a mile or so south.

In the plot a gang of men, intent on robbing a mail van at King's Cross station, inveigle themselves into a tiny house by the station, pretending to be a string quintet needing rehearsal space. In this they have to deceive a harmless old landlady (Katie Johnson) who in the end, after the deaths of the villains, is left with the loot with the blessing of the police. We trace the getaway route from the robbery through streets

Katie Johnson as the landlady in The Ladykillers.



between St Pancras and King's Cross which no longer exist. In *Train of Events*, a lesser known Ealing drama, Jack Warner plays a station master who lives in a terraced house on St Pancras Way, long since demolished. We'll see how these locations have changed - some almost beyond recognition - in the intervening decades.

Get here early to get the cheap seats at the front! And bring your own popcorn.

Images of Camden Past and Present

Thurs 15 December 7pm
Burgh House, New End Square, NW3

Over fifty years ago, Gillian Tindall and her husband Richard Lansdown began taking pictures of places in and around the newly-invented borough of Camden, especially in Kentish Town (where they had just bought a house in which they still live), and also in Camden Town and around King's Cross. They photographed old houses and small shops that struck them as prone to new-development. By and by they also photographed new phenomena, such as cafés, photocopying shops, discount stores. In twenty years they amassed several hundred pictures.

The photos (all transparent slides) slept in a dark cupboard for a further 30 years till the Lansdowns decided that something *Must Be Done* about them. They had always intended the pictures as an archival record, so with considerable labour and the aid of an ancient slide projector, they sorted them, keeping about 200. Gillian then spent weeks identifying the exact places, recording changes in shops and so forth, and now the whole has been given to Camden Local Studies, where they have been digitalised.

The couple retained images of some 30 slides, Richard took a few more pictures of especially interesting sites to create a 'Then and Now' record, which will be presented in this talk by Gillian.

Plus Christmas drinks at 7pm!

The Society's Website

www.camdenhistorysociety.org

buy our publications online • check on events to come and past • download currently out-of-print publications • consult index to our Review and Newsletter • access to Hampstead Court Rolls • view sample pages from our publications

BARGAIN OFFERS FOR OUR PUBLICATIONS ARE ON OUR WEBSITE!!

Fees at Camden Local Studies

Peter Darley writes: I have just made my seventh visit this summer to National Archives, Kew, where I am researching King's Cross. Typically, I can last about six hours before my brain is addled, and take up to 200 photographs of minute book pages, selected elements of which can then be transcribed at leisure at my desk at home. There is no charge for camera use. Nor is there any paperwork.

At the London Metropolitan Archive one pays a modest £5 for using a camera, but there is then no limit on how many images can be taken. This fee is perfectly acceptable. There is minimal paperwork.

Such an approach is not possible at Camden Local Studies at Holborn Library. A £5 camera fee entitles one to take ten photos, each of which one is expected to list on the application form. It would cost £100 to obtain 200 images, quite apart from the fact that one would also have to complete endless paperwork. The archive at Holborn is truly wonderful, but the pressure to earn a few peanuts means that it does not appear to serve those, such as myself, who are conducting extensive research. It seems that we are expected instead to sit there with the archives and transcribe onto paper longhand or directly onto a digital device. It would be interesting to know how much the Centre earns in camera fees.

I am perfectly at ease with paying reproduction fees, or fees for creating high resolution images (both NA and LMA have such fees), but consider the camera charges both unreasonable and counter-productive as they hinder my visiting the Centre, each such visit giving a poor return on the time spent there. Has the Centre partially lost sight of whom it is there to serve? Without the full support of researchers such as myself, and vulnerable to further cuts in local government funding, I wonder if it is not promoting its own downfall. I am struck by comparing the footfall at the NA and LMA with the relative emptiness of CLSAC.

This is a debate we need to open up.

A MISSING NAME

In the previous *Newsletter*, the list of members who were elected at the Annual Meeting to the Society's Council should have included Jane Ramsay. Apologies.

MORE FROM OUT WEST

The website managed by Dick Weindling and Marianne Colloms, <http://westhampstead.life.com> includes a new item, of murder, prison escape and a mistaken police shooting, centred on a house in West End Lane, in 1982.

Things to Come

19 Jan: Twenty extraordinary buildings on Primrose Hill, by Martin Sheppard.

16 Feb: Played in Camden – the sporting and recreational heritage of the borough, by Simon Inglis.

16 March: The launch, including talks by the researchers, of our new publications *The Streets of Bloomsbury*, and *The Streets of Fitzrovia*.

20 July: Air Camden: a century (and more) of aviation heritage in Camden, by Lester Hillman.

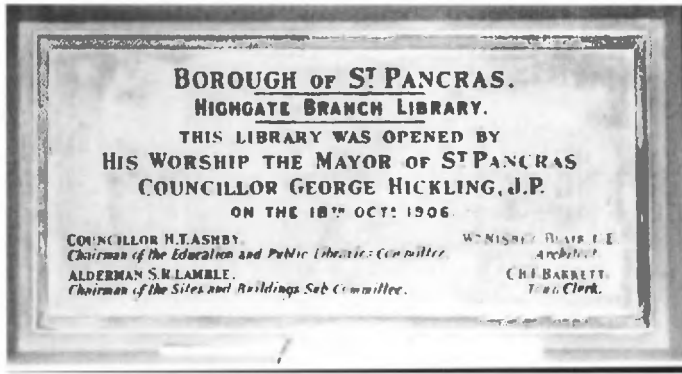
110 not out – Highgate Branch Library

Camden History Society members were well represented at a party in October to celebrate 110 years of the Highgate Branch Library, the first public library in the then borough of St Pancras.

The Borough Archivist, Tudor Allen, recounted the early history at the beginning of the twentieth century, the building being paid for by the US philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and the land bought for £500, that sum being donated to the project by Herbrand Russell, Duke of Bedford (whose other claim to fame is the introduction of the grey squirrel to England after being released on the Woburn estate). The library has a central main hall for the lending section with rooms on either side for newspapers (for which you had to stand up at high desks to read!) and the reference section. A children's library with a separate entrance was at the rear.

I subsequently found that the first librarian was a Mr Bond who went on to work in Portsmouth during WW1. An air raid warden investigating library lights in the blackout came in to find Mr Bond *in flagrante* with an assistant, and the Portsmouth council found that Mr Bond had also been running a fraud with a local bookseller causing the council to pay for non-supplied books. This was the end of Mr Bond's library career.

A later employee in the 1960s was our CHS member Malcolm Holmes, just before the formation of the borough of Camden in 1964. With all the redevelopment of Highgate New Town, another Camden department was supposed to take pictures for the Archives of the Victorian terraces then considered to be unfit before demolishing them, but did not do so. There was trouble when a Highgate New Town *Then and Now* exhibition found no 'Then' pictures to display. Malcolm had taken some slides of his own and donated them to the Library Friends at the end of his talk. Various unexecuted projects included replacing the library by a joint venture with the adjacent Islington on Dartmouth Park Road, and then a borough reference library on the Euston Road. Malcolm ended up running the borough archives, first in the Swiss Cottage library and then at Theobalds Road.



John Collier (Collyer?) was a local councillor from about 1970 and told us of his fights at the Town Hall, with varied success, to protect the library staff and facilities – but at least the library is still there, now with flourishing Friends to keep services going.

Our member Fabian Watkinson gave us the more recent history. Local architect John Winter had built himself two homes in Camden, a brick and concrete one in Regal Lane and a Cortan steel one in Swains Lane. Cortan weathers to a rust finish and being next door to Highgate Cemetery a wag suggested he should call the house 'Rust in Peace'. John Winter had been brought in around 1980 to modernise the library, cutting down the very tall bookstacks and providing very stylish lighting. By the time Fabian arrived in the area 14 years later the cut-down stacks had all disappeared, replaced with utilitarian ones and the lighting in the newspaper room, used now for the children's library, had been replaced by ugly strip lights – John Winter had not been consulted about these changes.

The evening ended with an account of the recent history and the formation of the Friends. Long may they continue to keep the library going.

Roger Cline

P.S. Tudor Allen thinks that the blame for introducing the grey squirrel should be shared by others. Google tells us that it was first introduced in 1876 at Henbury Park, Cheshire. At that time Herbrand was only 18. However. Google also informs us that the most important incursion of the lovable rodent was indeed at Russell's home patch, Woburn Abbey, in 1890, when 10 of them were imported there. Russell then proceeded to send pairs to other aristocratic estate owners, and to Regent's Park.

NEWS FROM AN OLD FRIEND

The Editor has recently received a letter from Deirdre Le Faye, who was a prominent member in the earlier days of the CHS. It was, she writes, her membership of the Society that set her off to research the life of Jane Austen. Christopher Wade pointed out the grave in Hampstead churchyard of Jane's aunt.

Deirdre lives now in Portishead, and is still writing about Jane Austen – she has written at least 6 books about her.

Universal Knowledge

The summer of 2016 saw the opening at 6 Pancras Square, King's Cross of the new headquarters of Google UK. Interestingly, likewise based in Camden, 120 years ago, was what might well be regarded as a Victorian precursor. Established in January 1884, the Universal Knowledge and Information Office was located in a Georgian house at 19 Southampton Street (now Southampton Place), Bloomsbury. It was the brainchild of Lord Truro who, as reported in the press, set it up:

'with the double object of benefiting the public and providing a new opening for the employment of women. [His idea was] to found a central office, where any person could have any question answered without delay, where researches into literature, science and art could be conducted, where all languages could be written or transposed, calculations be made, and statistics be kept available...

The system of arrangement is simple. Correspondents have been appointed in every town throughout the world. Its interior working is divided into departments, each comprising a range of subjects, from agriculture to Hindustani and from literature to engineering. A large staff, comprising over 30 persons, is kept on the premises, and among them are linguists capable of writing and translating every tongue from Welsh to Japanese, and from Portu-

Lord Truro



guesse to Greek. One is a practical chemist, another an engineer, while among the rest are artists, designers, ladies well up in the various kinds of fine work, tapestry & c., and gentlemen of liberal education and literary knowledge for general research. Besides these, some 200 others are employed on various errands. A large staff is kept making researches at the British Museum, another at the Guildhall Library..

Lord Truro personally superintends the bureau every day. Several hundred letters are received every morning, and more continue to pour in throughout the day. Every letter is at once attended to, and put into the hands of the lady or gentleman in whose department the inquiry may be. The questions ... comprise every subject, known or unknown. Languages [need] to be translated into English, and back again, and ... a very large number of queries come from abroad. The payment for these foreign questions is generally made in money or stamps of the country from which the letters come, and in this way Lord Truro has acquired a large and curious collection of foreign money and stamps.'

Small ads in *The Times* reveal that the minimum fee for an enquiry was a shilling (5p), plus postage; and

that the Office also employed outdoor staff called 'Desk Bearers', stationed in Oxford Street, Regent Street, Bond Street, Piccadilly and the Strand to accept queries from passers-by. Their alfresco customers were instructed 'Pay no money. Simply write your question, which will be posted at once by the bearer.'

The flourishing Universal Knowledge Office was, sadly, short-lived and seemingly closed on the death of the childless Lord Truro in 1891. Its Grade-II*-listed premises in Southampton Place still survives.

David Hayes

A HAMPSTEAD DOCTOR

Mr R M Healey recently wrote that he had an oil portrait of Thomas Goodwin, 'the Hampstead surgeon who in 1804 published *An Account of a Neutral Mineral Spring lately discovered in Hampstead*'. Is there any more information on him? Our member Steve Denford replied that around 1800 Pond Street accommodated so many doctors it was known as the Harley Street of Hampstead. Among those was Dr Thomas Goodwin, who discovered some local 'Neutral Saline Springs' and promoted yet another spa.

The Camden Theatre in Camden High Street, photographed c1904. The building is still there, nowadays a night club.



This Newsletter is published by the Camden History Society.

The Editor is John Richardson, 14 Saddleton Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 4JD, Tel: 01227 272605;

e-mail: richardson@historicalpublications.co.uk, to whom all contributions should be sent.

Our Secretarial Assistant is Daniel Croughton, 46 Southbury Road, Enfield, Middx EN1 1YB (email: enfd9223@hotmail.com).

The Treasurer and Membership Secretary is Henry Fitzhugh, 56 Argyle Street WC1H 8ER (email: henryfitzhugh@talktalk.net)

The Publications Secretary is Roger Cline, Flat 13, 13 Tavistock Place, WC1H 9SH, (0207 388 9889); email: roger.cline13@gmail.com

The Publications Editor, and the Editor of the Camden History Review is David Hayes, 62, Garrison Lane, Chessington KT9 2LB (0208 397 6752; email: davidhayes48@hotmail.co.uk)

Our Meetings Co-ordinator is Ruth Hayes at 62 Garrison Lane, Chessington KT9 2LB (0208 397 6752); email: ruthhayes53@hotmail.com

Our website: www.camdenhistorysociety.org

The Society is a registered charity - number 261044