



Est. 1897

The Heath & Hampstead Society **NEWSLETTER**

October 2025

Vol 56 No 3



'Icy Swim'

Contents

	Page
The Springett Lecture	5
Town Report <i>by Peter Kohl</i>	6
Unitarians: Autumn Winter Events	8
Double Vision: Vermeer at Kenwood	9
Planning Report <i>by Gordon Curtis</i>	10
Heath Calendar	13
Heath Report <i>by John Beyer</i>	14
The Future of Nature on the Heath <i>by Jeff Waage</i>	16
Hampstead Summer Festival	21
In Praise of Lanterns (and Lanthorns) <i>by Tom Rasmussen</i>	22
Seen on the Heath: Swan Family and Blue-Green Algae <i>by Ron Vester</i>	24
The Journals of Henry Sharpe <i>by Helen Lawrence</i>	26
Autumn Musical Events at St John-at-Hampstead	31
Eric Robinson Obituary <i>by Helen Lawrence and Vicki Harding</i>	32
The Camden New Journal <i>by Daniel Carrier</i>	34
The source of a sense of place <i>by Tom Oliver</i>	40
Children's Activities in the Library	48
Burgh House & Hampstead Museum	49
Heath Walks: 2025–2026	50

Front cover: The Society runs a regular photographic competition. To enter your photographs, just post them using the hashtag #myhampsteadbeath to Instagram or Facebook. Fiona Cunningham-Reid's image is the Society's current winner. Professional photographer and author, Matt Maran, is the Society's judge for the competition: 'I love this photo. The composition, light and moment capture the very essence of what it takes to swim in cold water. You can almost feel the chill!' See the Society's website for competition rules.

Chair's Notes

by Marc Hutchinson

Your Chair

As noted in previous newsletters, we are still searching for my successor as Society Chair. I repeat my request to members that anyone who is potentially interested in taking on the role should contact me in confidence as a first step. My mobile number is 07768 827405, and my email address is marchutch54@gmail.com.

Town Sub-Committee

Andrew Haslam-Jones stepped down as chair of this subcommittee at our June Annual General Meeting and sub-committee member Peter Kohl has kindly agreed to be its acting chair until a permanent chair can be found. Again, anyone interested in joining the sub-committee and taking on this role should likewise contact me in confidence.

Annual General Meeting

The resolutions proposed at our Annual General Meeting on 25 June were all passed. Accordingly, new membership subscription rates will come into force on 1 January 2026 as follows:

	Current £	As at 1 Jan 2026 £
Annual		
Annual individual	20	30
Annual joint individual	30	45
Senior annual (over 65)	15	22
Senior annual joint	25	37
Junior annual (under 25)	15	22
Junior annual joint	25	37

Chair's Notes (cont)

	Current £	As at 1 Jan 2026 £
Life		
Individual (65 and under)	335	502
Joint (65 and under)	410	615
Senior (over 65)	225	337
Senior joint	300	450

Several trustees retired at the Annual General Meeting: David Castle, Andrew Haslam-Jones, Robert Linger and Thomas Radice. I paid tribute to them on that occasion and gave a retirement party for them at my house on 8 October. I am pleased and grateful that David, Andrew and Robert have agreed to stay on their respective sub-committees for the foreseeable future.

I must also note the retirement of our archivist Malcolm Holmes. Malcolm served as the Society's archivist from 2012. He also serves, and will continue to serve, on our Plaque Selection Panel. Malcolm's historical knowledge of Hampstead, and indeed Camden, is legendary. He was for many years head of archives for the borough and in that role acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of its history. His research skills and knowledge have been and continue to be of great assistance to the Society.

Administration

The transfer of our records, accounts and database to the new XERO system is now complete. I realise that there was, from members' point of view, some delay and disruption during this quite lengthy process but I believe we are now up to date. If any member has not had a satisfactory reply to a query or instruction, may I ask that they email us at info@HeathandHampstead.org.uk. We are most grateful to the team at Stafford and Co., Accountants, for their hard work on this project.

Henry Sharpe's Journals, edited by Helen Lawrence

This new publication was referred to in previous newsletters. Well over 100 guests attended its launch on 15 September at Hampstead Parish Church at which the journals' editor, Helen Lawrence, a former Society Vice-President, delivered an accompanying lecture.

This substantial volume retails for £75 but the Society has, at the time of writing, a few copies which are available to Society members at the discounted rate of £25. Members who were unable to attend the launch should email the Society if they wish to purchase a copy. The edited journals are published in a single volume by the London Record Society with support, financial and otherwise, from our Society and the Camden History Society.

I am currently reading the journals, and they offer a fascinating insight into the many aspects of daily life, including in Hampstead (where the Sharpe family lived), in the 1830s and 40s.

Guided plaque walk

We are very grateful to Carol Siegel of our Plaque Selection Panel for leading a most successful and well-attended plaque walk in the village on 16 July. Some longtime Hampstead residents very much enjoyed being shown plaques and buildings previously unseen or unnoticed by them. It is planned to hold further plaque walks in the spring and autumn of 2026.

Pentameters Theatre

We were sorry to see the eventual eviction of the theatre from its first-floor premises at The Horseshoe pub. The eviction followed the failure to pay rent and to comply with repairing covenants in the lease. The Friends of



Helen Lawrence speaking at the launch of Henry Sharpe's Journals. Photo courtesy: Mike Dudgeon

the theatre are seeking to raise funds to support a 'new' theatre in the same space or perhaps in another space in Hampstead and, with Ward Councillor Linda Chung, are lobbying Camden Council, the freeholder, to seek to have the first floor at least kept as a community space.

Vale of Health Fairground Sites

I reported previously on the apparently unwanted presence of bollards blocking the unmade road from the Vale to the Heath which runs between the two fairground sites. In fact, the bollards nearest to the Heath were, it transpires, erected by the City of London, and those nearest to the Vale were recently re-erected by the owner of Bren Cottage at the behest of the Vale of Health Society to prevent unlicensed nighttime fishermen parking their vehicles in the road and blocking it.

Collins legacy

Long-time member of the Society John Allum Collins

died on 21 March 2024 and left the Society a £1,000 legacy in his will. The Society is most grateful for this gift which will be credited to unrestricted reserves.

Changes to Heath funding model

In previous newsletters I have referred, with concern, to the proposed change in the funding model for the Heath, moving from the deficit-funding model to the grant-funding model. Society officers, on their own and with other stakeholder groups, have had the benefit of meetings with two key individuals directly involved with the financial consequences of this project. The first was Kimberely Mitchell, the City's new external fundraising consultant. The second was Susannah Behr, the City's new Head of Development & Partnerships.

We have forcefully made known to these persons and the City our views on the on this issue which in summary are:

1. The annual City grant, with the realistically

Chair's Notes (cont)

anticipated income referred to in 3 below, must be at least sufficient to maintain the Heath in a good state, allowing specifically for the following: the Heath is currently *short staffed at every level*, and is going to require *additional staff and money* in the future to cope with the effects of climate change and vastly increased annual visitor footfall;

2. There must be extra and separate funding available to fund exceptional capital projects such as the 2015 Dams Project, the 2023 Athletics Track Project and the future Golders Hill Pergola project; and
3. There needs to be undertaken and published an assessment of the risks to the Heath and its management arising from the switch from the deficit-funding model to the grant-funding model, the obvious and principal risk being that the moneys from hoped-for third parties and from commercial activities on the Heath, when added to 1. above, are insufficient for the proper maintenance of the Heath.

At the time of writing, we do not know what the amount of the grant will be for 2026 but we are already concerned that it will not be as described in 1. above.

As mentioned in previous newsletters, the related discussion papers circulated to the relevant committees stated that, before the new model was to be applied to the Heath, it would already have been applied to Epping Forest and West Ham in 2025, so that the actual impact of the new model could be reviewed before being applied to the Heath. This in fact has been done but, at the time of the current fixing of the grant to the Heath, insufficient time has passed to assess whether the grant already made to Epping Forest has in fact been sufficient to demonstrate the success of the new funding model. This is a most unsatisfactory current position from the

point of view of the Heath, and we are taking this up with the City.

If the Society's concerns, as described above, are not satisfactorily addressed, the Society, with other Heath stakeholders, will campaign publicly on the issue, something from which, until now, it has refrained from doing.

Dog flea-powder and Pond contamination

I thank and congratulate Professor Jeff Waage on his organising and hosting a well-attended workshop on this topic at Keats House on 14 October. The purpose was to bring together, among others, local veterinarians, commercial dog walkers, Heath staff and academics in order to demonstrate effective alternatives to the toxic dog flea-powders which are killing insect life in the Heath Ponds.

Springett Lecture – St Stephen's, Pond Street – 30 October 2025

We have a celebrity guest speaker for this year's lecture, Robert Macfarlane. The lecture is at 8pm on Thursday 30 October (doors open at 7:30pm). Please note the change of venue: as originally advertised, the venue was to be at Rosslyn Hill Chapel but, owing to the expected large audience, the event will now be held at St Stephen's, Pond Street. Robert's new book, *Is a River Alive?*, will be on sale on the night, courtesy of Daunt Books.

The event is free for Society members.

Christmas Party – 9 December 2025

On Our Christmas party will be at 7pm on Tuesday 9 December 2025 at Keats House, and I hope to see many of you there. Your invitation accompanies this newsletter.

The Heath & Hampstead Society presents
The Springett Lecture

Living Rivers: Water and Animacy on Hampstead Heath and Beyond

A Lecture by Robert McFarlane

Thursday 30 October

7:30pm for 8:00pm | St Stephen's Church, Pond Street, NW3

Admission is free for members of:
The Heath & Hampstead Society
The Marylebone Bird Watching Society
The Vale of Health Society
The Highgate Society
Heath Hands

RSVP to events@heathandhampstead.org.uk

Tickets for non-members are available for
purchase on EventBrite

If you wish to watch the lecture free
of charge via Zoom, please contact
events@heathandhampstead.org.uk
and request the Zoom link



Town Report

by Peter Kohl

Streetscape

The Society has continued to engage actively on public realm issues, proposing Camden widen the pavement along a stretch of Hampstead High Street between Perrins Court and Perrins Lane. Extending the pavement would enhance the experience of pedestrians, support local businesses, and complement recent improvements in this part of the High Street, including Oriel Place, Perrins Court, and the linking alleyways.

Across Hampstead, the Society continues its work on heritage street furniture. The Society recently surveyed and photographed all of Hampstead's historic cast-iron framed benches, located in heavily trafficked spots throughout the village. These benches remain popular with residents and visitors alike, but many are now in need of repair. While the ironwork largely remains solid, though in need of refinishing, the woodwork



Historic cast-iron framed bench on Hampstead High Street

on a number of benches has deteriorated significantly. Following our survey, we submitted a proposal to Camden for the restoration of these benches.

As previously reported, the Society is actively engaged with Camden officers to identify and repair or replace damaged historic tiled street signs. These efforts are ongoing, and we will report further progress in future newsletters.

The Society has also been in touch with Royal Mail regarding the restoration of Hampstead's distinctive post boxes, many of which are chipped or faded. Careful restoration work will be required due to the age and materials of these historic structures.

Safe and Accessible Pavements

To help keep Hampstead's pavements safe and accessible for everyone, especially those with sight loss or mobility challenges, the Society encourages residents and businesses to play their part by ensuring pavements are kept clear of bins and any movable obstacles such as e-bikes and A-boards. Camden Council has announced a new enforcement initiative tackling badly parked and dumped dockless e-bikes, which often block pavements and pedestrian crossings. Also, the Royal National Institute for Blind People has highlighted the safety risks caused by e-bikes and other obstructions encroaching on pavements in its recently issued "In My Way" report. Residents are encouraged to report issues directly to Camden using the Love Clean Streets app, which can be downloaded on your smartphone. As reported in previous newsletters (e.g. Vol 55 No 3), the Love Clean Streets app also can be used to report messiness on pavements, such as fly-tipping.

Finally, for any problem with a street in Hampstead, such as a broken pavement, you can report the issue via Camden's Fix My Street site (fixmystreet.camden.gov.uk/).

Transport – Fitzjohn's Avenue

In June, Camden proposed a Safe and Healthy Streets plan for consultation covering the Fitzjohn's Avenue area. The proposal includes:

- a new 900-metre northbound segregated cycle track from College Crescent to Arkwright Road
- junction improvements
- new and upgraded crossings
- a Healthy School Street scheme and reversal of traffic flow along the UCS pre-preparatory school in College Crescent
- planting and greening (including rain gardens)
- 10 new cycle hangars
- consolidation of certain bus stops

The plan would result in the loss of 35 resident parking spaces and seven pay-and-display spaces. At this stage, changes to the intersections of Fitzjohn's Avenue with Arkwright Road and with Prince Arthur Road have been left for future planning.

While supportive of enhanced cycling provision and other amenities included in the plan, the Society raised several concerns in its response, including:

- whether alternatives to a built-up segregated cycle track might better improve cycling movement
- the lack of a complete and integrated plan, with no provision for the Arkwright or Prince Arthur Road intersections
- the inappropriateness of reversing traffic flow in College Crescent

- the impact on traffic flow and pedestrian safety from narrowing pavements and extending the Tesco loading bay on Heath Street.

The Society will continue to monitor developments closely.

Hampstead Post Office

The future of Hampstead's Post Office has been a significant concern in recent months. The Society can now confirm responsibility for the branch has passed to a new franchisee, UOE. In June, in a meeting convened and chaired by Hampstead's MP, Tulip Siddiq, the Society met with UOE's chief executive officer, Elliot Jacobs, and representatives of the national Post Office and the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum to learn more about plans for the branch. The Society understands day-to-day operations will remain unchanged until December, after which the branch is expected to open seven days a week with an expanded stationery service.

Culture and Amenities – National Trust Properties

Hampstead residents and visitors have long enjoyed the two National Trust properties in the area: Fenton House and 2 Willow Road (the Erno Goldfinger house).

Fenton House is a beautiful Queen Anne house and garden from the early history of Hampstead, while 2 Willow Road exemplifies the progressive modernism of the 1930s, when Hampstead played a leading role in the European art world.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, both properties were open to the public five days a week. This was reduced to two days per week afterwards. The Society understands the National Trust is now consulting on a further

Town Report (cont)

potential reduction in public openings, possibly to one day per week for one or both sites.

In response, the Society recently wrote to the National Trust, urging it to maintain, rather than reduce, public access. We are pleased Burgh House, The Well Walk Theatre, and the Isokon Gallery have joined the Society in pressing this case.

Policing and Safety

The Society continues to liaise with the Hampstead Safer Neighbourhood Panel on public safety. Local residents and businesses remain concerned about crime under-reporting and the need for a more visible police presence on Hampstead High Street. The Society continues to encourage members to report incidents, as this enables the police to allocate resources more effectively.

Residents may also sign up to Met Engage (metengage.co.uk) to receive community safety advice and alerts and to stay in touch with the local policing team.

Neighbourhood Forum and Local Businesses

The Society remains represented at the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum and the NW3 Business Association. The Forum has recently appointed Stephen Taylor as Chair and Andrea Lally as Vice-Chair. The Society will continue to work with the Forum and neighbourhood businesses to strengthen and sustain Hampstead village.



unitarians
ROSSLYN HILL
CHAPEL

Hampstead NW3 1NG

**'a spiritual home
for open minds'**

**Join us on Sundays for
these Autumn/Winter
highlights:**

November 2nd: 7 – 8pm

Samhain/Hallowe'en Pagan Ceremony

November 9th: 2 – 4.30pm

Lasting Powers of Attorney workshop

December 7th: 2 – 4pm

Climate Cafe to address climate anxiety

December 21st: 7 – 8pm

Winter Solstice Pagan Ceremony

www.rosslynhillchapel.org.uk

@RHUnitarianC

Double Vision: Vermeer at Kenwood

1 September – 11 January 2026

Following on from the resounding success of *Heiress: Sargent's American Portraits at Kenwood*, now comes a small, free – and extraordinary – new display, '[Double Vision: Vermeer at Kenwood](#)'.

Two paintings depicting the same subject, *The Guitar Player*, are on display side-by-side for the first time in over 300 years. Both are remarkable paintings and it's a unique opportunity to see them together in this 350th anniversary year of Vermeer's death in 1675.

Kenwood's own signed painting, 'The Guitar Player' hangs with Philadelphia Museum of Art's near doppelgänger, unsigned, and as yet, unrestored. Kenwood's *Guitar Player*, in exceptional original condition, is the only Vermeer painting that is unlined and still on its original stretcher, both of which make it more fragile.

It's an intriguing mystery. Could both works be from the hand of the Dutch master himself? Why was a copy created? If it is not by Vermeer, who could it be by and what else did they paint? Cutting-edge research techniques continue to unravel this puzzle. With only 37 surviving works reliably attributed to Johannes Vermeer, a breakthrough would be truly historic.

Why not come to Kenwood and see for yourselves? Compare the two and give your own opinions!



'Double Vision: Vermeer at Kenwood' is supported by The Friends of Kenwood, and by Riverstone Living

Planning Report

by Gordon Curtis

Five sites for potential development

In the January 2025 Newsletter (Vo. 56 No. 1), the Society brought attention to a collection of areas to the south and south-east of the Heath which are being considered for wholesale redevelopment, and indeed in at least three cases designs were in progress. The Society is concerned that these five sites have been identified as suitable for high-rise buildings in the latest Camden Local Plan – this plan is currently at the final checking stage and expected to be published early next year. And by ‘high rise’ they mean taller than the usual 30 metre limit for these zones, without actually stating any maximum.

To put this into context, 30 metres equates to around 10 stories for a residential block. The majority of buildings to the south of the Heath are not as tall as that; most are six or seven floors. Those over 10 generally stand out on the skyline view, and taller ones are very prominent. You can clearly identify Bacton Tower at 22 stories, Hawkridge House is 16 and the two towers on Fleet Road at 15. The Archway Tower, to which the Society objected to earlier in the year, was proposed to be 28 storeys.

In July, Camden submitted a planning application for one of the five sites: the redevelopment of the West Kentish Town Estate. This project is planned to be built in phases anticipated to take 20 years to complete. The present estate is predominantly of three and four storey blocks and is relatively low density with 316 flats surrounded by green spaces and quite a healthy scattering of mature trees, planted by the Civic Trust in 1964. The application is partly an ‘outline’ proposal, but it is highly developed and detailed in terms of building layouts and heights. This shows three tall buildings at 10, 12 and 16 storeys, whilst 10 other blocks are generally six to eight floors. The density is increased nearly threefold from 317

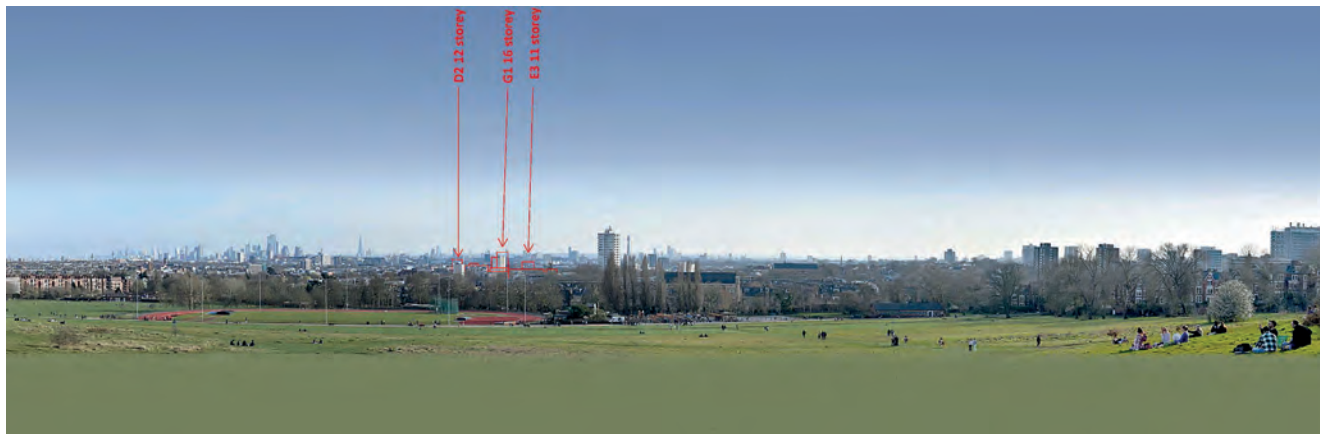
flats to 856 on the same site, although around 30% of these are proposed as single bedroom flats. Of the overall numbers provided, just over 60% will be for sale on the open market. Just under 40% of the flats will be for social rent. In other words, the provision for low-cost housing – 326 social rent flats – represents a gain of just nine flats; yet, this is a project which is scheduled to take at least 20 years to complete!

The first two buildings, for which detailed planning permission is being sought, will be built by Camden itself. The council has not secured funding for the further 11 blocks, and it is possible the council will enter into a private development agreement for the delivery of these buildings like it did at Bacton Low-Rise. Otherwise, the council may seek a public-private partnership, as it is proposing at Wendling and St Stephen’s Close.

In terms of green space, the plans provide for removing 73 trees and reducing the grass areas from around 9,000m² to 780m².

Sadly, this project seems to be falling short of real housing improvement, and to many it is an opportunity missed. Housing needs in the UK are a hot topic; the government was elected for promising to resolve the so called ‘crisis’ and have made some funding – with conditions – available. Big numbers may seem like the right headlines, but the real problem everywhere in the UK, particularly in inner cities, is the lack of affordable homes. These aren’t naturally attractive to commercial developers and local authorities no longer have the resources to build them on their own. This development, despite all of the energy it will consume and the people it will displace, does not make any significant improvement on the pressing needs.

Putting aside our somewhat peripheral observations



View from Hampstead Heath looking South with the profile of WKTE simulated

about a few eyesores on the Parliament Hill horizon, the proposals in this scheme are being questioned on many levels. There are too many to detail here, but they range from the long-term deterioration of life quality, the loss of trees and sunlight, and the overall environmental impact. Local and actual residents are the important representation and these have galvanised their positions in groups and forums. So far, there are around 300 registered objections to the application. The demands are consistently for three-bedroom family type homes at affordable rents or purchase costs because this is where the real shortage exists. Residents are concerned about density, overcrowding and noise, the loss of open outdoor spaces and the overall disruption of the present community. A viable scheme to retrofit and extend the existing buildings with a milder approach, which was supported by residents, has long been side-lined.

The Society is left to understand these private sector partnerships will be the predominant model for regeneration of public sector housing stock. Here Camden Council is simultaneously a client, developer and its own regulator. The council has multiple pressures to deliver and, whilst being practically without funds, it must deal with outdated

housing and a growing maintenance. So, it is hardly surprising that Camden Council should turn to one of its only assets – suitable building land – as a solution and, with little or no in-house expertise, it seems these services must be outsourced.

Anything only seems to happen once private financing and profit appear, and then suddenly so-called public development becomes attractive to the private sector. Is it possible to avoid this problem and improve affordable housing? Raising taxes does not seem to be politically possible at least for now. This project, however, seems to be helping the construction business rather than solving the housing crisis.

But overall, the Society hopes this project will be re-evaluated and the substantial objections will force a more moderate master plan. Meanwhile, the Society understands plans are advancing for the Bacton estate and that these include three high rise blocks and a more than four-fold increase in density. A mixed-use master plan is also in process to develop Regis Road in Kentish Town and the Society does not yet know the extent of tall buildings or the residential numbers there.

Turning back to concerns about tall buildings on the horizon, it is interesting to see one of the objections registered came

Planning Report (cont)

from Historic England, the organisation responsible for preserving listed buildings and heritage assets. Historic England has pointed out the proposed building profiles would interfere with a protected vista from the Heath to Victoria Tower at the Houses of Parliament. Naturally, the Society agrees. These views are free to all, enjoyed by millions, and it is heartening to know they remain monitored and protected when needed.

Other news and changes to Planning Restrictions within Hampstead

Article 4 Direction

The past few months have also seen activity with planning legislation related to Hampstead. The first is a proposed change by Camden Council to alter the permitted development rights regarding solar panels within the conservation areas. The term 'permitted development' allows owners to make certain alterations to their houses without needing planning permission, such as changing windows and in many cases adding rear and roof extensions. This exception is just for original houses and not flats or flats in converted houses. Some of these rights are excluded in all conservation areas, and some are specifically removed in what is known as an Article 4 Direction.

At present, there is an Article 4 within the Hampstead Conservation Area which removes the right to install solar panels on roofs and garden areas which face onto the street. Usually, this is the front of a house, but in some instances such as road junctions where houses are on a corner, this means the side as well and, even in some rare cases, where there is a prominent rear view. In such cases, Article 4 does not eliminate the possibility of installing panels; the article simply requires a planning application be made and the case will be decided on its individual merits.

Camden Council is seeking ways to reduce reliance on fossil

fuels, encouraging cleaner energy and the movement towards retrofitting and self-sufficiency. Currently, installing solar panels out of public sight without any need for permission, i.e., in rear gardens, outbuildings or a rear facing roof, is permitted without a planning application. Installing such energy solutions is a worthwhile endeavour.

Solar panels are undeniably modern looking and the panels are a standard type design made to fit a whole host of different roof profiles. They can look good when integrated into a new building or modern flush roof. Arguably, they are not similar to roofing materials such as clay plain tiles and natural slate associated with the Hampstead Conservation Area. For this reason, the Society has argued against the change. It was not an easy decision. Of course, the Society supports clean energy. Simultaneously, the Society attaches significant importance to conservation of the appearance of the Hampstead Conservation Area, particularly in the public realm. The Society feels if these quite radical changes occur, then the area would cease to be a conservation area at all. Therefore, the Society believes the present position which requires planning permission is the optimum one.



Example of solar panels on a clay tiled roof

It remains to be seen what conclusions Camden Council will draw following consultation.

Camden Local Plan

Camden Council has been revising its local plan and the final draft has been submitted for final inspection. The Society has made representations about tall buildings which the Society expects will be ignored. The Society is more hopeful for clarification and moderation as a result of its representations regarding flood mitigation and the sizes and positioning of basement developments. The plan is expected to adopted in early 2026.

London Plan

The London Plan is also in the process of being revised for publication in 2026. The Society regards this as more of an overview than the Camden Local Plan. In many cases, the

London Plan is a higher authority. One must be mindful of cases where the Greater London Authority may overrule a local authority decision. One such example is the still-awaited fate of Archway Tower.

One key point in the London Plan is the protection of Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). It may seem obvious to say the Heath and some small parcels of adjacent land are all designated as MOL and are totally protected from development. There are no proposals to reduce the areas of MOL. Indeed, there seems to be some incentive to increase them. In this period where changes to green belt land are already taking place, this is welcome news as the Society does not wish to see any erosion of the Heath boundaries. The Society has recently become aware of one such threat and will work with authorities to prevent it.

2026 Heath Calendar



The 2026 calendar shows the very best of the Heath's diverse landscape and its wildlife throughout the seasons.

The range of images reflects the work of City staff and Heath Hands volunteers who help protect the Heath for future generations.

It is produced in partnership with the City, Heath Hands and Matthew Maran.

Available from matthewmaran.com, selected local shops and Amazon.

Heath Report

by John Beyer

Charities review and future budgets

From April 2026, the City will move the Hampstead Heath Charity to a new funding model. Under the new framework, the Heath will be allocated funding from the City and have to operate within that budget; under the existing arrangement (called deficit funding) which reflects local authority practice, the City covers a certain level of funding but is also liable to cover any overspend. The Heath Sub-Committee is working



Ash and son receive kite guidance. Photo courtesy: Richard Boudreaux

with colleagues on the City's Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee to achieve a realistic grant from the City in future years. By changing to the new model, the City hopes to bring in funding from other sources and a consultant has been lined up to look at further funding options. We have been briefing the consultant on what can reasonably be achieved in terms of extra income; perhaps there is scope for more individuals to sponsor specific projects. However, the Society would not want to see inappropriate signage or events which do not fit the Heath.

Sexual activities: West Heath Working Group

The Society is part of the recently constituted West Heath Working Group, set up by the City to address issues related to male-on-male sexual activity on the West Heath. Our concerns are the extension of activity into daylight hours and the consequent unpleasant interaction between some of the males and other Heath users; the prevalence of drug taking and drug dealing in the area; and the increase in litter, including needles. We would be happy to hear of anything you have witnessed in the area. Email info@heathandhampstead.org.uk.

Kite Festival on Kite Hill

On Sunday 29 June, the Kite Society of Great Britain came to Parliament Hill for another kite festival organized by the Society with support from the City. As it happened, the wind was somewhat erratic and weak which limited activity by the largest kites. However, children were able to keep their lighter kites soaring above Parliament Hill. The Kite Society has agreed to come again next year for this popular event. The provisional date is Sunday 28 June 2026.



Star leaps to greet Kate



Preparing to launch. Photo courtesy: Richard Boudreaux

Natural Aspect summer concert

On Sunday 31 August, three bands entertained upwards of 1,800 people at the Parliament Hill bandstand. Peace and Love, Roscoe Coltrane and Kinobe each played for 40 minutes, while Dan Carrier (who we know from the *Camden New Journal*, and see his piece in this Newsletter, page 34) provided recorded music in between acts. Meanwhile, Kate Evans, the stilt-walker, amused children and adults. Children and many adults appreciated the circus skills workshop provided by Dan Rose and colleagues. We have pencilled in a date for next year: mark Sunday 30 August 2026 in your diary!



People enjoying the Natural Aspect concert

The Future of Nature on the Heath

by Jeff Waage

In this piece, Jeff Waage, Society Trustee and member of the Heath Sub-Committee, explores three issues which he believes will determine the future of nature on the Heath in coming decades: climate change, people pressure and resource limitation.

Few of us will have missed the news that nature is in decline in Britain. The abundance and range of our wild plants and animals have been falling steadily over the past 50 years and one in six species is now estimated to be at risk of extinction. The Heath is not immune to this decline; indeed its long history of recorded nature study illustrates how dramatically its biodiversity has declined over three centuries.

UK-wide biodiversity loss has been driven principally by loss of natural habitats. Climate change is a relatively new driver of decline and likely to become its dominant driver in coming decades. The Heath is a

natural area enjoying considerable protection for the past 150 years. Its principal challenges are degradation habitats, pollution and climate change. All of these are compounded by its growing isolation in an increasingly urbanised landscape, reducing replenishment and exchange from other nature-rich areas. For all this, it remains a remarkable 320 ha of English countryside in the middle of a world city. It has more than a thousand recorded species of plants and animals, and many more yet to be discovered. Many Heath species are rare in London and some even nationally.

Climate change

We naturalists on the Heath are excited to see how rising temperatures in southern England have brought more continentally-distributed dragonfly species onto the Heath. But climate change is overwhelmingly bad for biodiversity on the Heath. In coming decades, it will render Heath habitats less suitable for the trees and plants which have long grown there, affecting the many species dependent upon them. We are already seeing the changes in local weather patterns which will gradually intensify, namely warmer wetter winters, more intense heat and drought in summer months and more intense storm and rainfall events. This is the likely driver behind an emerging trend of increased treefall we now see on the Heath, with trees weakened by drought and damaged by extreme weather. With the loss of veteran trees also go habitats supporting distinctive Heath wildlife. In the decades ahead, many of our more shallow-rooted trees like beech, sycamore and birch are expected to decline in the face of prolonged drought, while warmer, wetter winters may increase levels of disease and pests of Heath trees.



Tommy explains the biodiversity boards



Butterflies on the Heath: up, down, out? Photo courtesy: Ken Copsey

Butterflies give a good snapshot of recent effects of climate change. Last year, UK butterfly populations experienced an unprecedented decline nationwide, driven largely by the highest spring rainfall ever recorded, and this was seen as well on the Heath. This year, we have had the highest spring temperatures and sunshine ever recorded, and our butterfly numbers are up again. OK for now, but these increasing extreme weather events destabilize populations, and as they grow more intense, a particularly bad drought or period of storms might be just enough to eliminate butterfly species from our isolated, urban green island.

What can we do? Urgently stopping climate change is the answer, but that topic is beyond the scope of this article. For the Heath, the specific challenge is to adapt. And Heath managers are increasingly doing this by making Heath habitats more resilient to change: fencing veteran trees to protect their root systems, creating more wildflower-rich meadows to support butterflies, and much more. Heath foresters are considering climate



change in selection of tree species to plant or encourage, and other conservation experts are reducing the regular mowing of grasslands, allowing growth of long grass meadows which can hold moisture in a drought and support more biodiversity. Ultimately, conserving some of the nature we have now on the Heath will be increasingly futile, but if we start now to develop more climate-resilient habitats we have a chance of maintaining a thriving, if rather different, biodiversity on a future Heath.

People

The pandemic greatly increased the number of people using the Heath. Post-pandemic, several factors appear to be maintaining high levels of use. One is a growing public awareness of the physical and mental health benefits of “time in nature”. Another may be simply a growing demand for relief in an intensifying urban “heat island”. A future driver of increasing numbers on the Heath will be local development and population growth. For instance, thousands of new homes are now

The Future of Nature on the Heath (cont)

planned for development near the Heath, and improved public walkways to access the Heath, like the Heath Line from Kentish Town.

The Heath will become a critical green resource for more and more Londoners. Londoners need and deserve this, but growing numbers will affect habitats on the Heath, as we saw in the pandemic, where paths through woods and meadow increased and widened and undergrowth was degraded.

The Society has been particularly involved with one aspect of this growing use: the increase of dogs on the Heath. The pandemic doubled dog ownership in London. Dog walking is much-loved Heath activity with health benefits for both people and dogs. Unlike

people, dogs wander more frequently off paths in woods and meadows and enter ponds, where they may disturb wildlife. For instance, research led by the Society has shown that hedgehogs and some birds avoid woodlands with more dogs, potentially limiting their access to food. Other Society-led research has recently shown swimming dogs can release poisonous pesticides from topical flea treatments that threaten aquatic biodiversity (see e.g. Vol 55 No 3).

No one is to blame here, certainly not the dogs! The legitimate use of a limited, nature-rich space by more and more people and dogs can inadvertently lead to the loss of that nature for everyone. To avoid this, visitors need to be aware how their activity affects nature and



Hedgehogs avoid woods with dogs



Concerts on the Heath – not good for bats

then be willing to change behaviour to protect it. Heath managers can make helpful interventions, like the fencing of veteran trees to help walkers avoid damaging their roots as they pass. But maintaining a nature-rich Heath will ultimately depend on the action of its users.

Resources

As natural as the Heath may seem, it is intensely managed. Left alone, meadows would become woodlands and wetlands would silt up and do the same. The Heath's diversity of habitats and species would decline as would our access to them.

The Heath's landscape is managed by about 20 full time staff of the City and English Heritage. Volunteers from Heath Hands play a critical role in extending this capacity of Heath staff to manage habitats. For all this effort, human resources and budgets for managing habitats are highly stretched today.

The City's recent decision to change its financing of the Heath to a grant-based model has generated some concern in the Society (see Chair's Notes and Heath

Report in this Newsletter) and elsewhere, as has the difficult financial position of English Heritage, which made a similar funding transition a decade ago. A commitment to generate more income from the Heath leads many to think of the kinds of music festivals hosted by other large London green spaces and their potential impact. Their impact on nature is surprisingly poorly known. However, a soon to be published, Society-led study provides some evidence from the Heath. The Society investigated the impact of the Kenwood summer rock concerts in 2022 on populations of the Heath's nine protected species of bats. These concerts brought loud music and crowds of up to 10,000 to a venue just beside the Heath's ancient woodland where bats feed and roost. The Society's study showed bat foraging was significantly reduced during these evening concerts. While bat activity recovered after concerts, a failure to feed over a series of nights could be enough to affect nutrition, particularly for lactating female bats, and the Society concluded such concerts should not be held on landscapes with protected bat communities.

I am not suggesting Heath managers are considering new festivals to generate income, only that new efforts to pay for the costs of running the Heath should avoid harming wildlife. Nature recovery could even be the target of the right kind of new income generation. The recent philanthropic sponsorship to create an island nature reserve in the Model Boating Pond is an example.

Supporting the future of nature on the Heath

Drawing on the challenges above, I suggest four actions for managers of the Heath:

Prepare budgets anticipating growing investment in landscape management.

The Future of Nature on the Heath (cont)

As the City sets its first annual grant for the management of the Heath, it must take into account climate change and growing visitor number will require increasing investment in land management in coming years. Anticipating “business as usual” and simply keeping up with inflation will fail to protect nature on the Heath. Good information and foresight work on climate change and visitor trends needs to be generated and used to develop future strategy and budgets.

Rest the Heath: set aside “people- and dog-free” areas to allow nature recovery

To allow habitats under pressure to recover from human and other impacts, areas on the Heath can be set aside for a few years, while others remain open, and this can be then be rotated. The City already does this in Highgate Wood to mitigate visitor pressure. The Society has long championed the stipulation in the Hampstead Heath Act of 1871 the Heath be forever kept “open and unenclosed”, but this is 2025 and the threat is no longer about Victorian enclosures. The threat is climate change and over-exploitation. With appropriate explanation, fencing and resting areas on the Heath will help visitors to see for themselves the negative impact we can have on nature and how we can reverse it.

Increase public support for nature through positive messaging

Visit most urban green spaces in and around London and you will see families clustered around discrete and attractive signs explaining natural habitats and their wildlife. This does not happen on the Heath, where there has been a view, championed by the Society, that signage interferes with enjoyment of the Heath. I signed up to this view when, in 2021, the Society established the seasonal biodiversity boards at Heath entrances only. I suggest now the public needs to see

conservation in action on the Heath. Positive messages about protecting ponds and special habitats to support nature will be more effective than negative messages like “NO SWIMMING” and “NO DOGS” which do not explain why.

Create green buffers around the Heath to protect and extend its biodiversity

The Heath is a green island in a growing city. As surrounding neighbourhoods become more built up and nature-poor, it will become isolated ecologically and less resilient to shocks like droughts and surges of visitors. Species lost will not be replaced by dispersal from other nature-rich areas. To avoid this outcome, we need to protect green spaces in the fringes of the Heath and connect them to the Heath. Creating these nature corridors will not only protect the Heath but enrich biodiversity in urban areas, with all the health and environmental benefits that brings. Corridor initiatives of this kind are starting around the Heath, including the Society’s own Camden Nature Corridor campaign, hedgehog highway projects led by Heath Hands and Growing Green and Hampstead Garden Suburb’s “Britain’s Biggest Living Garden” project. They deserve support by Heath managers and local communities.

Finally, I acknowledge a healthy nature experience is only one of the services Heath managers are trying to deliver to visitors, along with wild swimming, sport, dog walking and many others. However, all human activity on the Heath affects its biodiversity. If we want to maintain nature on the Heath, we need to understand how other activities affect it, and make informed decisions based on that to create the right balance of recreation and conservation.



HAMPSTEAD
SUMMER
FESTIVAL

ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR!

2025



Isabel Langtry at the Big Fair 2025

Mr Supero Punch and Judy Show

Fun at the Garden Party



Vanity Fair

*This is part of the Hampstead Summer Festival and a portion of tickets sales comes to
Hampstead School of Art & Keats Community Library.*

Keats Community Library and Keats House, Keats Grove, NW3 2RR



**Hampstead
School of Art**

Thanks to our sponsors



In Praise of Lanterns (and Lanthorns)

by Tom Rasmussen

Victorian lanterns can still be found in a variety of places in London, and Hampstead Village particularly. This piece traces the history of some of these.

One of the minor pleasures available to anyone walking through the older parts of Hampstead, along with Highgate and some other ‘village’ areas of London, is to be able to follow the progression of Victorian lantern-style lamp posts along the narrow streets. In Hampstead, the core of the lanes lit by this means lies either side of Heath Street and the High Street, eastwards as far as East Heath Road, with the Vale of Health as an outlier; while the western boundary is a line roughly from Judges Walk to Hampstead Parish Church.

One such lane is Holly Walk, the location of St Mary’s Catholic Church with its adjoining terraces to either side, which together form perhaps the prettiest small-scale Georgian enclave in the whole neighbourhood. The two photographs included in this piece were taken in 2018 and 2025 and reveal one detail very clearly: recently, the old Victorian lamp post opposite the church has been removed and replaced by a tall plain post a few feet distant, of a design that is ubiquitous throughout the capital.

Two questions come to mind. Does the modern design enhance or detract from these historic surroundings? Lamp posts positioned along narrow streets, of whatever

period, are of course vulnerable, and apparently the original post was damaged by a delivery lorry. Also recently, the next lamp post down the lane has similarly been replaced.

The second question is whether this marks the beginning of the ripping out of all old-style lamp posts along these streets, as and when they suffer damage or maintenance issues or simply for modernising’s sake.

Lantern-style street lamps were originally gas



*Victorian lamp existing in 2018.
St Mary’s, Holly Walk*



*Victorian lamp replaced in 2025.
St Mary’s, Holly Walk*



Ford Madox Brown, *Work* (1852-1863). Detail, adapted from F.M. Hueffer, *Ford Madox Brown. A Record of his Life and Work*. London, 1896

lit, a feature which in London goes back to the very beginning of the 19th century. In the mid 19th century, there is one shown in Ford Madox Brown's painting *Work*, perhaps the best known of all Victorian images of Hampstead village. His scene of The Mount shows the road being dug up to facilitate a new piped water supply. The original painting is in the Manchester City Art Gallery, but the lamp post is shown best in a black-and-white reproduction published in 1896 and included in this piece. Look to the extreme left above the female figure leaning over and you will see it.

The artist completed the canvas in stages during the 11-year period of 1852-1863. His diaries for these years make several references to painting the 'lanthorn' – which is the old alternative spelling bringing to notice that originally the light source was often protected not by panes of glass but by thin sheets of translucent horn. The lanthorn is featured in his preparatory painting 'The

Mount and Heath Street', housed in the same gallery, where it is shown in full length but also in deep shade.

Walking up the same road today one can see not all that much has changed and it is still possible to pinpoint where the scene was set, although the artist had to widen the road a little so as to accommodate his large cast of characters. The main activity in the picture is situated a little further downhill from The Mount. He did include the houses of Mount Square at the top of the road, and (in the original complete painting) the sweeping curve of Heath Street seen to the right in the reproduced image. At some later period, perhaps at the time of electrification, his lanthorn was replaced by a standard Victorian lantern and moved not just by a few feet as at Holly Walk, but by 20 or so yards up the hill.

Classic Victorian lamp posts have many design virtues, not least their human scale which is entirely suited to the narrow streets and low-rise buildings – of Victorian or often earlier date – which they were intended to illuminate. They deserve to be left alone wherever possible to cast their own particular atmospheric glow.



The Mount, Hampstead



The swan family on Hampstead No 1 Pond

Seen on the Heath: Swan Family and Blue-Green Algae

by Ron Vester

Ron Vester has been providing the Society with regular photos and updates about the swan couple and their cygnets and you will find their stories in the Newsletter archives online since 2008. He also provides photos of the blue-green algal bloom.

June 2025 saw the birth of the latest cygnets on the Heath. They were born late in the season, on 4 June, and named the Geminis in honour of their birth sign. This is the smallest brood on record for the Heath and it may be because of their parents' age. The swan couple first flew into Hampstead No 1 Pond on the Heath 11 years ago and were already mature at the time. The pair could be 14 years old or even older.

Prior to this year's brood, the swan couple averaged at least seven eggs annually. The cygnets stay and learn from their parents how to feed and explore until they are seven or eight months old, when the parents chase them

off and The Swan Sanctuary takes them and places with flocks in much larger spaces.

This year the swans had a new nest close to Hampstead No 2 Pond for easy access when they were born. The cob, was a brilliant guardian chasing



Swimmers disturbing the swans, the pen fleeing with her cygnets and the cob trying to defend them



The cob trying to defend his family's place while swimmers are unaware

off geese and intruders. However, there is a raft on Hampstead No 2 Pond specifically for the swans and other waterfowl. Hampstead No 2 Pond is closed to swimmers, but some people are unaware.

During one very hot day, approximately 20 people were swimming in Hampstead No 2 Pond. Some of them swam up to and damaged the raft where the cygnets



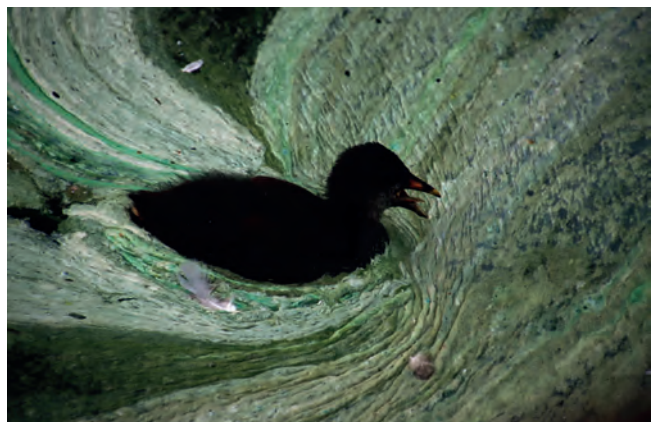
The badly damaged raft on Hampstead No 2 Pond

were resting with their mother floating nearby. She puffed up her wings to ward off the intruders and then fled with her cygnets. The cob also came to the rescue of his family. The raft has survived, but is badly damaged.

There are many other stories about these swans over the years and many are in the newsletter archive. For now, this family survives and is a joy to observe.



Blue-green algae occurs naturally in nutrient-rich waters like the ponds on the Heath. The algae can cause upset stomachs or more serious side effects and should not be ingested by people or dogs. It may also be harmful to water fowl



Baby moorhen makes a striking piece of art as they swim through blue-green algae on Hampstead No 2 Pond

The Journals of Henry Sharpe: City merchant and Hampstead worthy, 1830, 1840-1847

by Helen Lawrence

Helen Lawrence was the guest speaker at the Society's Annual General Meeting held on 25 June 2025, during which she introduced this fascinating journal which she has edited for publication. This is an edited transcript of her talk. The book is published by Boydell and Brewer on behalf of the London Record Society with the support of the Society and the Camden History Society. It is available as a hardback and e-book from: boydellandbrewer.com

In 2018, just as I was in the last stages of completing a new history of the Heath, Malcolm Holmes, Camden's archivist for many years, asked me if I had seen the Sharpe collection. I had seen a Sharpe collection in the Camden Archive, but this turned out to be another, quite different one, which is not listed in the catalogue.

Tudor Allen, Camden's present archivist, kindly located it for me. Amongst the memorabilia of Henry's grandson,

Eric Sharpe, who had assembled this collection of family papers, and to whom it originally belonged, was a large sheaf of typed papers: the Journal of Henry Sharpe. As I read it, I knew I had found a document of such significance to the history of Hampstead and the Heath, that it deserved to be published in its own right. It contains many details about important historic events in Hampstead not to be found elsewhere and opens a fascinating window on 1840s London.

The Sharpes were not only one of the leading Hampstead families throughout the Victorian era, but Henry Sharpe made a huge contribution to Hampstead life, acknowledged by 19th century historians. Yet today he is forgotten.

The family had risen from humble beginnings as needle-makers in Blackfriars in the City to become solid middle-class merchants and lawyers. Henry's father, Sutton, had retired from the needle-making business, and began a new venture. But in 1806, he was overwhelmed by calamity. His beloved second wife, Maria, Henry's mother, died of fever, and his new business failed in that same year. He was ruined. Already inconsolable at his wife's death, it was said he took his own life, leaving six orphaned children to the care of their grown up half-sister, Catharine. She devoted herself to their upbringing, supported by their mother's family, the Rogers, who were City bankers,



Henry Sharpe 1802–1873. Sharpe collection, CLSAC

and ensured that Henry and his four brothers all received a good education.

Henry attended Bransby's, at Stoke Newington where they then lived, and one of his school fellows there was Thomas Maryon Wilson the future Lord of the Manor of Hampstead. This is perhaps one of the most extraordinary elements of the journal, because here, for the first time, we are given unique insights by someone who actually knew him, into the character of this strange and difficult man, whose notorious actions were so fateful for the Heath, and for Commons preservation nationally. What Henry had to say about Maryon Wilson in his Journal is revelatory.

Another of his class mates at Bransby's was a German boy, Wilhelm Drusina. This led to an unusual feature of Henry's life, his spending five years in Germany on leaving school. Thus, he spoke and read fluent German, and also French and Portuguese, and he maintained his German friendships all his life.

Henry began his Journal in 1830, the last year of the reign of George IV. He was 27 and had just established his own business in the City as a merchant, trading with Portugal. However, his initial enthusiasm for his diary petered out after a few months and it was not until 10 years later, in 1840, that he returned to it, by then married, with a growing family. This time he maintained the Journal until 1847.

The diary covers a period of only nine years, but the text is rich with observations about the key political and social concerns of the time, national and international events, and commentary on life in London. It was a period of momentous developments. The Industrial Revolution, with all its astonishing innovations, and the great rebuilding of London that transformed it into an

imperial city, provided the backdrop to Henry's world.

In 1841, he moved his residence to Hampstead, to find a healthier environment for his children, setting up house at 1 Elm Row on the corner with Heath Street. He and his wife had strong ties of friendship and family there, which centred around the Unitarian Chapel, then known as the Red Lion Hill Chapel. Amongst his many friends were Lucy Akin and Joanna Baillie the famous Hampstead writers, Joseph Toynbee (Arnold Toynbee's father), Henry Crabb Robinson, one of the founders of London University, and C.R. Cockerell, the eminent architect who lived at Ivy House, North End.

Henry played a critical role in educational and social developments in Hampstead, of which there are almost no other contemporary accounts. His Journal adds layers of fresh information about missing detail and forgotten bits of Hampstead history, providing a fascinating picture of daily life there in the 1840s.

He became reacquainted with Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, his old school-friend, and was careful to preserve a friendly relationship with him despite the difficulty of dealing with this hot-tempered man. We learn how West End Green was first



Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson 1800–1869. Lord of the Manor of Hampstead. From the Society archive

threatened by building in 1845, not, as most histories tell us, in the 1870s. Henry was instrumental in thwarting this move, by interceding with Sir Thomas – a new piece of Hampstead history, not found elsewhere.

He adds hitherto unrecorded detail about the famous campaign to preserve the Heath, such as an extraordinary Vestry meeting when he was able to persuade Sir Thomas to negotiate with the local gentry, led by John Gurney Hoare.

Another new piece of history is the battle for the Sunday donkey rides on the Heath. The nuisance caused by the donkey men was of long-standing, and the local gentry were trying to use the Lord's Day Observance Act to stop the rides completely on Sundays. Henry felt this was unfair, and saw it as the rich trying to tyrannize over the poor. He risked putting himself at odds with his Hampstead neighbours, by opposing their attempts to prosecute the donkey-men, and he used his standing with Sir Thomas to plead on behalf of their cause.

Henry's lively interest in everything evokes a whole era, with an extraordinary depth of discussion, and range of ideas on literary and artistic matters, and political and social developments. His German friends kept him supplied with all the latest philosophical and theological publications then leading thought in Europe, which of course he could read in the original language.

He describes his visits to the great new Pall Mall clubs, the Atheneum and the Reform, both just built. His curiosity takes him to see the new gas works and waterworks. He and his wife are regular visitors to the Royal Academy Annual Exhibitions, then based in the newly built National Gallery. He takes his young son to see Brunel's astonishing Thames Tunnel at Wapping, just opened in 1843. He uses the new steamboats on the

Thames and the new railways as they come on stream one by one.

As a City merchant, he gives us an insider's view of events, all but forgotten today, over the rebuilding of the new Stock Exchange, opened by Queen Victoria in 1845. There was controversy verging on scandal surrounding the competition for its design, and dissatisfaction with it amongst some of the leading merchants, which Henry shared.

He was deeply interested in education, believing strongly in its power to enhance people's lives. He informed himself about all the latest ideas, and visited schools all over London to study their methods. He taught in the Church of England parish school in Hampstead, and at the non-conformist Harp Alley school in the City. All these sessions were squeezed in either before or after work, or on days off, and he often had the boys to his house for lessons, and for social events. His journal offers a rare insight into how the existing patchwork of voluntary educational effort worked.

Henry's greatest project was the setting up of the Hampstead Reading Rooms, to provide books and evening classes for young local working men, at minimal cost. At its height the Reading Rooms were providing lectures and classes in all sorts of subjects, and a cricket club on the Heath in the summer. Based in rooms rented from the Workhouse in New End, it is another important part of Hampstead life not recorded in any histories.

A fascinating project, established by his brother-in-law Edwin Field, an eminent lawyer who lived at Squires Mount, was the Hampstead Conversazione Society. Henry played a significant role in the success of this

The Journals of Henry Sharpe: City merchant and Hampstead worthy, 1830, 1840-1847 (cont)

forgotten enterprise and his accounts of these events fill in quite extraordinary detail.

His other activities included keeping the local subscription library going through difficult times; providing seats for the public on the Heath, and putting up public drinking fountains; but none of this has received much notice in any of the modern histories.

Although the Journal stops in 1847, material in the archives, together with two published biographies of other family members, has made it possible to piece together Henry's life, both before and after the nine years covered by the journals, so as to complete the story. And indeed, it is a story. He tells it almost with the art of a novelist, weaving together so many varied strands and turns, that the reader is sometimes held in suspense.

His accounts of the lives of his four brothers who all achieved success and some measure of eminence, is one of these interesting strands. The most famous member of the family was his uncle, Samuel Rogers, the 'banker poet', a renowned literary figure. Dickens dedicated *The Old Curiosity Shop* to him, and in 1850, he was invited to succeed Wordsworth as Poet Laureate; but then already 85, he declined the honour on account of his great age. Rogers entertained all the celebrities of London at his house at 22 St James's Place, Piccadilly (destroyed by bombing in World War II). Henry was very close to him and regularly attended his famous breakfasts, where he encountered an extraordinary array of eminent artists, scientists, explorers and men of letters, providing another most interesting strand of the Journal.

Henry's accounts of the ups and downs of daily family life and raising children are a most charming aspect of his diary. His deep love for his wife Eliza, and concern

for her wellbeing, shines through the whole journal. He delights in his children, but agonizes over how to deal with their naughtiness, "without being too harsh", providing many unintentionally amusing vignettes. And it certainly offers a new perspective on Victorian fatherhood.



*Eliza Sharpe 1811–1901 (née Kinder),
Henry's wife. Sharpe collection, CLSAC*

Henry's business went from strength to strength throughout the 1850s, enabling the family to move in 1865 from Elm Row to one of the great old Hampstead houses, The Grove, today's Admirals House.



The Grove, today's Admirals House. Barratt's Annals of Hampstead

Henry died in 1873 and is buried in the Churchyard of Hampstead Parish Church. A plaque to his memory was put up in the church by the men from the Reading Rooms.

During the course of his narrative, Henry refers to many eminent people and historic events, now long forgotten. I thought readers

might, like me, want to know more about them. I greatly enjoyed delving into old histories and newspaper archives to find out more information, which I have put into footnotes. I hope these complement the narrative, and provide an additional source of interest for readers.

George Potter, estate agent and one of Hampstead's local historians, was a younger contemporary of Henry's. In 1907, he wrote:

Mr. Sharpe was a man whose memory ought to be treasured in Hampstead... His work in the parish is very inadequately recorded by the Mural tablet in the parish church. To me it has long been a matter for wonder and regret that a no more fitting record of such a valuable life has yet been given to the public.

Perhaps this remarkable journal, rediscovered after nearly two centuries, will provide that record.



Henry Sharpe's memorial plaque. East gallery, Hampstead Parish Church. Sharpe collection, CLSAC



Image by vecteezy

Members' email addresses ***Are you missing out?***

Keeping you informed of the latest news and events.

The Society is increasingly using email, to let members know of vital issues that crop up between Newsletters.

It is also an invaluable way to bring you other useful information, such as walks, talks and events that do not fit in with the Newsletter timetable.

If we do not have your email address you may be missing out on important local and Society news and initiatives.

So, if you have not already done so, please do send your email address to the Society at:

info@HeathandHampstead.org.uk

Make sure that you include your name and street address so that we can identify you.

This will also enable us to update our membership records and simplify our communications with you.



Autumn Musical Events

***St John-at-Hampstead Parish Church,
Church Row NW3***

Saturday 25th October 7.30 pm.

Charmian England Recital

Works by Rachmaninov and Ravel
Geoff Clapham – baritone, Joanna Lam – piano

Saturday 8th November

Fauré Requiem ‘Come and Sing’

Directed by Aidan Coburn

Sunday 14th December 7.30 pm

The Choirs of Hampstead Parish Church

Orchestra of period instruments
Directed by Geoffrey Webber

The Hampstead Collective

Monday 1st September, 7 pm

Anthems of Orlando Gibbons:

Music for voices and viols

Monday 4th October, 7 pm

Music of Nikolai Medtner:

Christine Buras, Jessica Gillingwater, Thomas Ang

Monday 3rd November, 7 pm

Purcell Reimagined:

Ruairi Bowen, Matthew Farrell,
Geoffrey Webber, Gavin Roberts

Songs for Ariel

Music for tenor and countertenor by Purcell,
Britten and Tippett

**Tickets on sale at the door
All enquiries to Jenny Macdonald-Hay
0207 794 1193**



Delivering the Newsletter by email

Would you prefer to receive your Newsletter by email in the form of an Acrobat PDF file so that you can read it on screen?

It is environmentally more friendly, saving paper, unnecessary waste and cost.

With postage charges increasing, this is now a major consideration. The occasional extra flyers could also be sent via email, if wished.

PDFs of the Newsletter can be seen on the website.

If you would like to try this, please let us know at:

info@HeathandHampstead.org.uk



Remember to use the

Hampstead Card

The current list of businesses taking part in the scheme can be found on the Society's website and can be downloaded from there:
www.HeathandHampstead.org.uk

Benefits offered are granted at the traders' discretion. The Society is not responsible for changes in terms or availability of any discounts or offers.

Eric Robinson 1929 – 2025

by Helen Lawrence and Vicki Harding

Helen Lawrence and Vicki Harding remember a pioneer of urban geology who was the Society's geological adviser.

News of the death of Dr. Eric Robinson at the age of 95 will be received with great sadness by all those concerned with the wellbeing of the Heath. Described as the UK's premier urban geology enthusiast, and recognised internationally, his illustrious career spanned more than 70 years.

Eric was born and educated in Newcastle upon Tyne; he was offered a place at Cambridge University, but financial hardship led him to accept instead a scholarship at Newcastle University. On graduating in 1954, he moved to London to teach at University College London, where he remained for 50 years, becoming a senior lecturer. He was a well-loved tutor and mentor to generations of students at UCL, and a revered figure in British geology,



Dr. Eric Robinson at South End Green leading one of his walks

pioneering revolutionary 'urban geology'. He was Librarian, Senior Vice-President and President (1991–1994) of the Geologists' Association. He was also adviser to The Victorian Society, English Heritage, and Vice-President of the Royal Archaeological Institute.

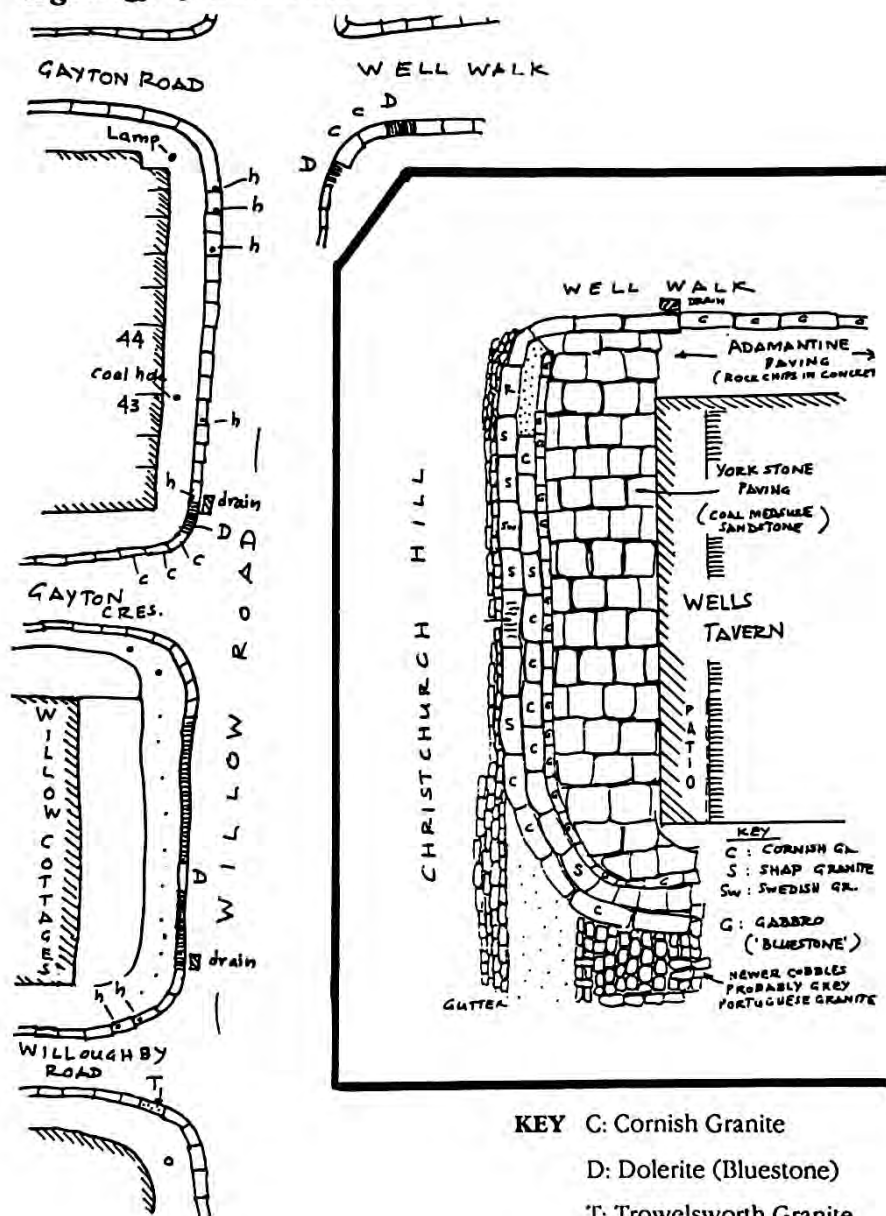
Always a kind and helpful presence, Eric was a truly public-spirited man who gave generously of his time to community organisations and charities. In 1989 at the invitation of John Carswell, then Society Chair, he joined the Society as geological adviser. He was an expert witness for the Society on several important planning battles, in particular the famous 'hole in the ground' at South Hill Park in the 1980s; saving Branch Hill from development; and the dam proposals for the Heath ponds in 2015, when he took the trouble to send us a detailed letter stating his objections, even though by then he was well retired and had moved to the country.

He often used the Heath in the training of hydrogeologists as he found it "the best available ground for fieldwork of a practical nature". For the Society he led many walks in Hampstead, both on the Heath and in the village; gave talks; participated in a public Brains Trust on nature conservation and ecology; and contributed articles to the Society



Dr. Eric Robinson

A geology of Willow Road



Newsletter, with illustrations from his own hand-drawn leaflets of the many and varied aspects of local geology (example left). During the Great Storm of 1987, upturned trees on the Heath displayed the important underlying geology of the Bagshot sands, becoming known as 'Robinson's Pits'.

The Geologists' Association has produced a booklet in his honour entitled *Ericdotes*; and an 'Erichive' of his many publications and unpublished, hand-drawn leaflets (of which there are also many in the Society archive), has been deposited at UCL. We remember him with great affection and gratitude.

The Camden New Journal – history and a plea

by Daniel Carrier

Daniel Carrier has been a reporter for the Camden New Journal for many years. Even before writing, the paper was very much a part of his life. In this piece, Daniel looks at the history of the CNJ, other local papers and reflects on the current landscape. He believes local papers are important for the community and pleads for readers' and residents' support.

March 1862

It was from a shop on the Holloway Road that the first edition of our newspaper rolled off the print presses.

C. Hancock was a publisher, bookbinder, printer, bookseller and newsagent. From behind his counter, he could not have failed to note how his business was thriving – and how often new London newspaper titles were emerging. “Why not a title for our area?” Mr Hancock thought. After securing enough advertising from firms along the Holloway Road, The Holloway Press and Hornsey Advertiser hit the newsstands.

152 years on, we are still publishing, today under the masthead the Camden New Journal. The founding of the Holloway Press reflected a boom in information and its distribution in the 1800s.

Mr Hancock's newspaper was the grandchild of an earlier version his father produced, which came out in 1828. Called the Islington Gazette, it was sub-titled “Monthly Miscellany Of Local Intelligence, combined with Literary and general Information and Amusement.” It was distributed by a printer based in Eliza Place, Sadlers Wells and could be found in ‘news vendors in Islington, Holloway and Pentonville.’

Later, in 1836, The Penny Magazine was published from Palmer Terrace on Holloway Road at a firm called the Holloway Press – where our own story started in 1862.

Victorian heyday

The Victorian newspaper boom, of which our newspaper was a product, was caused by a number of factors. Firstly, more Londoners could read. In 1820, the literacy rate was 53%. In 1870, it had risen to 76%.

Second, printing improvements meant better images. The Illustrated London News, which hit newsstands in 1842, was the first weekly in the world that led on illustrations. This kickstarted a 50-year period that was truly a Golden Age, before competitors in other mediums such as radio made their mark on how we consume news. Finally, technical improvements to printing, greater professionalism among reporters, and new owners with axes to grind combined to create the first era of genuinely mass journalism.

In 1895, Mirror editor W T Stead employed women on the same salaries as their male counterparts. He was a trailblazer who promoted the idea that a newspaper did not have to reflect the news of yesterday, but should form the views of tomorrow. Newspapers could reflect the will of the people, run campaigns, but the increased economic demands and financial benefits of owning a newspaper made an impact in the 1890s onwards: as a large commercial concern, it had to guarantee advertising and sales. That meant entertaining and amusing, not just informing.

The rise of the national game gave sports editors a role. Women's pages and gossip columns, celebrity and society news, politics and Parliamentary think pieces, lots of illustrations and special investigations proliferated.

Keeping it human became important: nature columns,

sketches, travel writing all made their appearances, as did interviews, opinion pieces and serialised novels.

By the Edwardian period, daily London papers were on every street corner, and newsagents had hundreds of titles for sale.

The twentieth century

As well as the Camden Journal, north London news was supplied by titles including the Hampstead and Highgate Express, Hampstead News, The Holborn

Guardian, Islington Guardian and Hackney News, Islington Times and the Hornsey Gazette, The Middlesex Independent, The North West London Times, The Paddington The Paddington Mercury, The St Pancras Chronicle, St Pancras Gazette, The St Pancras Guardian and Camden and Kentish Towns Reporter – and the marvellously titled Trotting World and Horse Review, printed in Cathcart Street, NW5.

These papers served our boroughs throughout the early and mid-20th century, until larger media firms began

The collage features several newspaper advertisements from the early 1900s. At the top is 'THE HOLLOWAY PRESS' (THE HOLLOWAY & HORNSEY & MUSWELL HILL PRESS) dated Friday, August 6, 1909. Below it are various small ads for 'PURE MILK', 'EMERTON & SONS, L.M.', 'NOFARS MILLINERY SALE NOW ON', 'W. Freeborn & Sons', 'THE GLOBE HOTEL', 'FRIERN MANOR DAIRY FARM', and 'ARCHWAY TAVERN'. Other visible ads include 'THE DUNHAM CASTLE', 'HUNTLY STUDIO', 'BOWEN & MALLON', 'SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND', 'EXPRESS DAIRY CO.', 'LONDON VAN HORSE PARADE', 'LONDON CART HORSE PARADE', 'INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW', 'FINCHLEY CARNIVAL', and 'EFFICIENCY ENTERPRISE AND EFFORT'.

An example of local papers at the turn of the 1900s – this edition dates from 1909 and was one of many competing for the attention of north London's readers

This collage shows another set of local newspaper advertisements. At the top is 'Hampstead & Highgate Express' dated Saturday, July 15, 1904. Below it are various small ads for 'BOWEN & MALLON', 'SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND', 'EXPRESS DAIRY CO.', 'LONDON VAN HORSE PARADE', 'LONDON CART HORSE PARADE', 'INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW', 'FINCHLEY CARNIVAL', and 'EFFICIENCY ENTERPRISE AND EFFORT'. Other visible ads include 'THE DUNHAM CASTLE', 'HUNTLY STUDIO', 'BOWEN & MALLON', 'SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND', 'EXPRESS DAIRY CO.', 'LONDON VAN HORSE PARADE', 'LONDON CART HORSE PARADE', 'INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW', 'FINCHLEY CARNIVAL', and 'EFFICIENCY ENTERPRISE AND EFFORT'.

The Ham and High in the 1920s: at the time Express Dairy stable boys would exercise their horses on Kenwood – prompting local children to head over the Heath and night and joy ride the animals, causing consternation in the Ham's letters page. This front page advertises their annual horse show, which would see the animals walked down to Regents Park for the display

The Camden New Journal – history and a plea (cont)

buying up titles from the 1960s onwards.

Owners amalgamated and our own Journal became part of the Courier Press Holdings stable by the 1970s.

Living in the eighties

The element of surprise is an old favourite among newspaper proprietors shutting down titles and the Courier deployed it with a vengeance back in 1980. On December 18th that year, Eric Gordon – editor of the Journal – and Howard Hannah, deputy editor and father of the National Union of Journalists North London News Chapel, were summoned to the union headquarters on Gray's Inn Road and told that the paper was being shut down with immediate effect and all of its staff sacked.

They had to head up to an Indian restaurant in Turnpike Lane to tell colleagues at the office Christmas dinner the grim news.

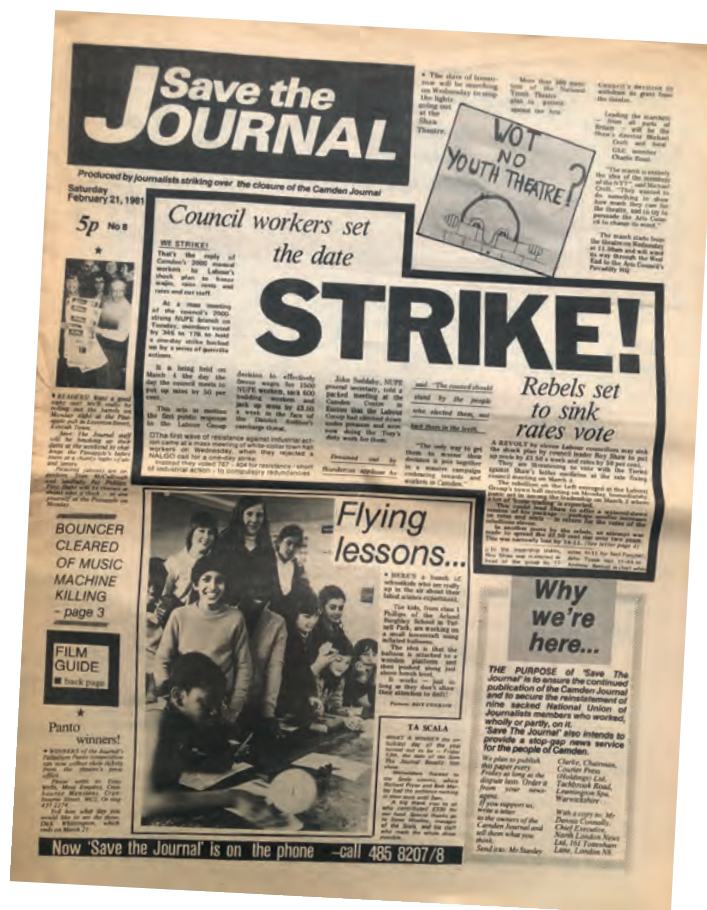
The Journal was the smallest of the three papers in the North London News group. The biggest circulation was the Islington Gazette and then the Hornsey Journal.

But under Eric's editorship, the Camden Journal had a strong and loyal readership. We gained that by being committed to challenging injustice and campaigning for a better life for all. Staff of all three papers met the next morning and decided unanimously – and bravely – to strike until management agreed to withdraw the closure.

In 1980, the once unrivalled UK local newspaper network was shrinking. Our colleagues' concern was, of course, the loss of jobs but also the loss of local newspapers to communities which still relied on them for information, for campaigns and for a platform for their voices to be heard. As mergers saw the demise of hundreds of titles, owners increasingly lost their

commitment to their areas in a scramble for bigger profits derived from ever larger media companies.

Over that first weekend before Christmas 1980, reporters were determined to keep the Camden Journal alive. They contacted readers from all sections of the community and also journalists on local papers throughout London. Local MPs – Frank Dobson in particular – councillors from all parties, tenants' leaders, trade union branches rallied to the call of "Save the Camden Journal"



Save the Camden Journal

The campaign spread. Hundreds of journalists joined in: the entire NUJ membership on suburban London newspapers took action. Journalists throughout our company's newspapers in the Midlands and West Wales went out on indefinite strike.

For the members of the North London News NUJ chapel, these were days and nights of immense hard work. Organising meetings and fundraising events countrywide, all while throughout they wrote and published a weekly paper, 'The Save the Camden Journal'. It came out on a Thursday and then had to be sold in pubs, at stations and in bingo halls throughout the borough. Actor Denholm Elliot would arrive on a Thursday to collect a pile of papers that he would then sell at various Hampstead and Camden Town pubs he planned to visit over the weekend. For the staff, it was an exhausting and exhilarating period. But ultimately the times were against the reporters. New laws limited the ability of fellow trade unions to give support. Arbitration dragged on and in the end the fight to save jobs and stem the tide of closures was lost.

Management offered to sell the title of the paper for £1 – and Eric Gordon took up the challenge, with his Camden Journal colleague Angela Cobbinah.

And true to his idiosyncratic self, Eric immediately changed the title to the "Camden New Journal".

"That's awkward, it's in the wrong order," our current letters and Review editor, Howard Hannah, recalled saying. Eric shrugged. It remains an easy to remember title.

It was in the New Journal's early days that word soon spread through William Ellis school in Parliament Hill Fields: The New Journal needed you on a Thursday afternoon. They would drop bundles of the paper with the names of the streets scribbled across the top and a

saggy cloth sack to fling across a shoulder.

Pay was a penny a copy.

The paper route

I took on a route that saw me deliver up and down the terraced slopes of Dartmouth Park and traverse Gospel Oak with my sack, adding pocket money to cash earned by doing a paper round before school. Every morning I'd find a doorstep to read the football news before I dropped the title through the door. Fridays were extra special as the Ham and High dedicated three whole pages to Spurs, written by their chief football reporter, the legendary Pat Mooney.

When I took on the New Journal round, I did the same – taking a moment to have a read of the goings on at the Town Hall, the sensational crime reporting, issues over housing, schools, transport and jobs, the football games at Market Road, written as if they were Wembley cup finals.

Those evenings perched on a doorstep, reading smudgy newsprint laid the way for a lifetime of writing that same, smudgy newsprint.



Sometimes CNJ has met the head of State. Here the CNJ joined staff at the Royal Free as they greeted Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on a royal visit

The Camden New Journal – history and a plea (cont)

The value of your local paper

This early wage means I have now worked on and off for my hometown newspaper for 38 years in a number of roles, and I can tell you why I think the New Journal plays an important role in our community.

It is free. We were the first free newspaper – a ground-breaking idea at the time, and one often copied now but for different reasons. Today, the free sheet is a vehicle for advertising: the New Journal editors took the decision to ensure as wide a readership as possible, to empower every member of our community with information.



The annual Society conkers competition on Parliament Hill Fields has always provided CNJ reporters with colourful images and a chance to 'tickle the public,' as many an editor tells their cub reporters. It is a line taken from the ditty: 'Tickle the public, make 'em grin, The more you tickle, the more you win...' and ends with the lines 'Teach the public, you'll never get rich, You'll live like a beggar and die in a ditch.' Thankfully, CNJ's founding editor, Eric Gordon, would always end the rhyme before reaching this stanza – he believed the CNJ could help people learn more about their lives by informing as well as tickling

We are a cooperative. There is no Rupert Murdoch of Camden holding the power behind the editor's chair: the New Journal was set up with no shareholders to pay dividends to. Instead, we have always invested every penny back into our newspaper. Where others have cut staff and slashed wages, we have kept a newsroom resourced and in the heart of our community.

Our newspaper has given vital experience to scores of reporters who have gone on to other media roles. Our former colleagues take the New Journal's principles to other news organisations. We have always encouraged diversity in an industry that needs it desperately. I would like our newspaper to be a vehicle to help train and place in media jobs underrepresented people – it's not rocket science to see that a more diverse media is vital in the UK today. We hold power to account, asking the questions, giving a voice to those who need a platform, and providing a forum for debate.

Our role as a fourth emergency service – which really hit home to me personally during the Covid-19 pandemic, when we established a food project – is one of the most fulfilling things about this job. People come to us for help and advice, and we do all we can to honour their trust.

And that is a fundamental element of working here: I am forever grateful for the trust and confidence of our readers. I've been invited into kitchens across the borough to hear of tragedy and triumphs, of problems, issues, controversies and mysteries. We have been there for births, lives and deaths, giving us a window on life today. You have trusted us with your secrets, your stories, tales that are deeply personal.

It is a privilege none of us takes lightly – but today, it is under threat.



Many Society members will remember the titanic battle led by the likes of Hampstead campaigner Peggy Jay and the Ham and High editor Gerald Isaaman to stop a MacDonalds opening in the High Street. The CNJ has always lent its voice to enhance and protect its villages – from helping save Hampstead's High Street post office to a campaign to stop a coffee chain expanding

A drastic drop in advertising revenue in the past 10 years has decimated local newspapers, vital income hoovered up by global internet companies. This comes as large newspaper groups continue their asset stripping. Whereas in the past towns and cities would have a newspaper owned by a local business, a champion of the area, a source of regional pride, a consolidating push by big newspaper groups in the past 20 years saw hundreds of remaining titles bought up, and resources slashed to the point that has made them almost irrelevant to the beats they used to cover.

I sadly use Camden as an example: we used to compete with the Ham and High, the St Pancras Gazette and the Camden Chronicle at council meetings to get scoops. The Ham no longer has a physical presence in the patch they cover, the offices at Perrins Walk and then Avenue Road long gone. The Gazette and Chronicle are sadly long departed, closed by owners looking to cut costs. Forty-three years on from us gaining the word New in

our masthead, we have seen many once-mighty titles disappear, or reduced to soulless editions irrelevant to their readers.

So where do we go from here? Regional newspapers matter, and not just for the here and now. What will people in 100 years' time use to look at the minutiae of life today? What record will we leave of our times, for generations to come to study and learn from? The New Journal is better placed than others to survive.

Another classic front page from the New Journal, combining coverage of the CNJ's successful campaign to save the Whittington Hospital's A and E department, and the newspaper's coverage of the death of that beacon of old Hampstead intelligentsia, the Pilgrims Lane-dwelling Michael Foot

The Camden New Journal – history and a plea (cont)

We cover the greatest demographic you could wish for – if north London can't maintain a local newspaper, then where can?

We have low overheads – none of us earn anything like the wages we could on nationals. We have a dedicated news team – colleagues of mine have been here as long as I have, so we genuinely know our beat. But we are at the point now where, without investment and support, the future is again uncertain.

That's why we are asking our readers to support us by joining our subscription service, and inviting ideas from the readership as to how we future-proof this remarkable institution. While our weekly print edition remains a must read for households across the borough on Thursday mornings, and a vital cog in local democracy, we now offer a paid-for weekly newsletter, packed with insightful writing about the place we all call home. We hope those who can afford the small contribution towards our important work will help support the CNJ by subscribing, and we know with your help we can continue to record what matters to those who live on our beat.

Many of you reading this will know how much I appreciate you as sources for the topics we cover: I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your many stories, tip-offs, and help over the years. Your input and support to keep the New Journal at the heart of our communities would be gratefully received.

To support the CNJ, please go to www.newjournal.substack.com



The CNJ has always followed closely issues around protecting the Heath, offering a forum for those who cherish the open space to engage with the City, the Heath's custodians



The view: north east towards the Wye valley

The source of a sense of place

by Tom Oliver

*On 27 March 2025, Tom Oliver, a Society Patron, gave the 3rd Hunter Davies Lecture entitled *Mystery Tour: the quest to revive an ancient landscape*. This was a very personal account of the trials, tribulations and great successes of Tom's restoration of an old farm and its land in the Welsh Marches which Tom had known since childhood and which he and his wife now own. This is a summary of that lecture.*

It is reasonable to assume that most people who are members of the Society are interested in the abstract idea of a sense of place. Whether specific locations or landscapes begin this interest or whether the initial idea finds resolution in real places, is impossible to know. But one way or another, we mind about the Heath and its immediate surroundings. What we mind about varies

a great deal: views; buildings; the natural – or semi-natural – world; the community of people; the history and culture; how the place is used and regarded. Overall, however, we tend to think this is a special place which deserves attention, devotion, protection and an assured place in the future.

I should like to try and explain how I have responded to these same instincts and insights on a small patch of traditional farmland which my wife and I decided to buy. It is found right on the edge of England, in the ambiguous territory between the productive farming country of central Herefordshire and the rough open uplands on the border with Wales.

The source of a sense of place (cont)

The subject of this inquiry into making sense of a sense of place is a small traditional farm of about 80 acres (or 30 hectares) between 700 and 900 ft (200–300 metres) above sea level. The land here slopes downwards to the south east, and is crossed by fast flowing, rocky streams (there called brooks) which eventually flow into the Severn via the Wye. The views are wide and long to the east, the Malvern Hills and the Cotswold escarpment, between 25 and 35 miles away. In between, there are undulating hills, partly wooded, partly cultivated, partly pasture. The city of Hereford and villages in the intervening country are hidden in the lower lying parts of the view, nowadays breaking cover at night when they light up the sky above them. The rising sun floods the fields with light in the morning and the soft slopes to

the west prolong the evening light, and there is no long view to the west. But quite often there is no sun at all: this is rainy country and, at this height, also quite chilly by English standards. The spring comes quite late – really only in April – and the torpor of autumn begins in early October. It is what one might dispassionately call an in-between place in many ways – and I suspect that plays an important part in why it kindles in me such affection and interest.

The way the land looks, of course, plays a significant part in why it inspires affection. In the language of landscape, its 80 acres lie across a shoulder of ancient sandstone hills. The very top of the farm is 900 ft above sea level, the very lowest part about 700 ft. That puts it just below the uplands which are generally considered



Ancient meadows studded with English oak, sessile oak and common ash

to begin above about 1,000 ft. The space is defined by fields with high hedges, mostly lined with mature trees. Three deeply sunken rocky streams thread their way across, two marking ownership boundaries and one tumbling and splashing right through the middle, falling 100 feet over 400 yards, with our fields on either side for some distance. All of the fields are permanent grass and the hedges are mostly allowed to grow tall and increasingly wide. The predominant trees are both species of native oak and ash, with maples and alders also common. There is a sprinkling of other species – crab apples, sallows, a few wych elms, hollies, rowans, aspens and willows. The hedges are old and varied, but hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, holly and maple recur. There are 18 fields – seven tiny ones under 2 acres in extent, the largest only just over 12 acres and the average being about 5 acres. The perimeter boundary is 2 miles long and the internal boundaries amount to about another 2 miles length. About half the internal boundaries are hedges, the rest mostly lines of trees, where hedges used to be. So, this is a relatively intimate landscape right at hand, which contrasts with long views across the local valley and much further to the 20-to-30-mile horizon. It is easy to see that this looks attractive, and has a sense of long continuity, sheltered and yet open to ever-changing skies.

And so it is. But if I describe the farm in more detail, the idiosyncratic character of the land and its significance to us will become clearer. I have known this farm all my life: many of my earliest memories of the texture of the countryside, exploring and observing, are all around. We were lucky as children to be welcomed by the two successive farmers between the 1960s and the 2010s, who tolerated our make-believe sword fights, our dam building – and busting – days, bird watching and



Ancient meadows studded with English oak, sessile oak and common ash

rambling. Over this long time, the fortunes of farming, of wildlife of every kind and of farmers themselves changed and changed again. The farm became an anchor of relative stability, a place that changed less than most landscapes, re-assuring and welcoming. I played for countless hours on old abandoned farm machinery gently parked in quiet corners of fields and later enjoyed remembering those hours as I sometimes sought solace from the adult world. It was a place where one was reminded of the way farms used to be. But if I was honest, actually, it had changed, in ways I regretted, though more slowly than most other places I knew. When the farm came on the market, it was for the first time in more than a century – a century that had seen so much more change in the farmed landscape than any previous one. It was a place bypassed by much of the attrition of the years.

Part of the appeal of this modest patch is that it is made up from different land-owning origins. Just under half was until 1915 part of the local ancient castle estate,



A (rather showy) southern marsh orchid (Dactylorhiza praetermissa)

with old, irregular fields, many with Welsh names. Until the 16th century, this was the front line with Wales, vulnerable to border raids, an outpost of Norman and then English culture. But another half, though just as much on the border, was until 1919 part of a huge and prosperous Welsh aristocratic estate, where the marks of estate investment and planning in the 18th and 19th centuries long ago smoothed and widened the awkward angles of previously contested and dangerous country. A third, smaller, curious part of the farm is in the form of tiny fields with almost certainly very old boundaries, possibly pre-Conquest, which were improved neither by great aristocratic nor modest gentry resources. A fourth element is former rough common land which was enclosed very late in the history of enclosure – so late in fact that the Tithe Map of 1843 records the pre-enclosure boundaries. That is a very rare thing, but very

helpful in offering a glimpse of the unwritten history of the farm before the 19th century. A surviving rare flower, sneezewort, tells of the last vestiges of the wilder country tamed by enclosure.

The older history of this place is still there to see, through interpretation, despite there being almost no surviving old records at all. The longer one spends looking at this landscape, the more is suggested through the shapes of fields, the course of hedge lines, the pattern of trees and streams. Farmed for over 1,000 years, there are strong indications of a slow, steady, hard-won establishment of increasingly well organised farming until the agricultural collapse of the late 19th century. One of the more poignant places is a tiny enclosure – whose name is recorded as ‘Coppice’ in 1843. Such a generic name can mean only one thing: there was no other parcel of land nearby to be confused with it. By 1886, this field was open pasture, indicating that it was probably the last patch of ancient woodland to be cleared for some distance around in about 1850, the time of the last advance of agricultural confidence. It still has a rich variety of plants including betony and devil’s bit scabious which are pretty rare here nowadays.

One of the Welsh field names translates to ‘field with a mill’ and, sure enough, the faint remnants of a tiny mill pond are traceable along the edge of the fast-falling stream. This mill ceased working so long ago that it was never named in English.

Ironically, the railway only arrived too late, after mid 19th century investment had petered out and many people had moved away to find prosperity elsewhere – not least in North America. Tiny traces of the fleeting railway era are found in small patches of brick used to repair stone walls in about 1900, the use of corrugated iron in

relatively recent farm buildings and, as a valedictory sign, genuine, still oily railway sleepers given a second life as gate posts. The mid 19th century tithe map indicates about half the farm grew arable crops. This seems very odd indeed in such wet and difficult terrain, until one realises that these were energy crops – oats to power horses, until about the time of the Great War. By the time of the Dudley Stamp national land use survey of 1936, all the farm was down to grass, the farming by then much quieter and much less intensive. And that's about where we, very modestly, step into the picture.

The 20th century story of our farm, and many like it, is one of steadily declining economic viability. This decline was postponed by the exceptional demands for food production and government actions during two world



A (very smart) Mrs common blue (Polyommatus icarus)

wars. Had it not been for the U-boat menaces of 1917 and 1942, it is quite possible that our farm would have reverted to a complicated patchwork of more or less abandoned fields, much like the abandoned farmland-turned-secondary woodland of New England on a much smaller scale. When I first remember the farm, in the late 1960s, the kind and dedicated tenant farmer was still managing to run a small herd of Hereford beef cattle as well as some sheep. Cider making, which used to take place, had long ago stopped, and myxomatosis had ended the rabbit harvest. I loved feeding the handful of lambs in spring with a baby's bottle, while being terrified by the excitable bullocks in their matted brown and white livery. But when that tenant retired in about 1980, the new man had to find other sources of income, despite European Community subsidies. He was a successful and very busy contractor, but the farm suffered from relentless grazing all year by more and more sheep. Slowly, the connection between the farming and the healthy condition of the land was detached. Hedges became stilted lines of shrubs with little or no undergrowth, the fields permanently grazed to the ground and the diversity of plants reduced. With that went declines in birds – numbers and species – and insects and the plants upon which they all relied.

With the farm put on the market in 2016, we decided to seize what was almost certainly a once-only opportunity to seek a revitalised path for this little patch. Could this place, which I had known so long and in which my feeling for landscape was so steeped, be brought back to its former richness and complexity if it were no longer required to make a profit? Could there be other things it could do instead? Things we wanted, things we missed, things we remembered? The uncomfortable facts appeared to be that land



Evening light cast across the canopies of English oak and newly baled hay

like this would become increasingly stripped of its variety, its delightful detail and its ecological value as it became part of an ever more rationalised management to ensure economic viability. It would be likely to be added to another larger landholding, a small, unregarded part of an increasingly brisk and robust operation. Or the implacable economics could be confronted and abandoned and a different way of valuing and using this land be tried. That is what we decided to do, luckily being in a position to at least try a new path. After eight years, the signs are mixed, but it's been fascinating and, in many ways, a very rewarding experience.

We have concentrated on trying to restore the ancient, difficult and now rare practice of traditional hay making. This now accounts for the majority of the area of the farm – about 80% – and makes us an unusually extensive hay growing landscape. Hay management supports a great range of plants and encourages a very extensive number of invertebrates – specially butterflies, beetles, moths and micro-moths – whose life cycles are given much more time and space. Hay also looks beautiful – fields with a procession of different flowers and grasses for four months in a row. The hay harvest is a poetic business, even nowadays, with the sequence of cutting, drying and turning (tedding), rowing up and baling. The

amount of hay grown in Britain has collapsed in the last 70 years – mostly because it is so weather dependent as a crop and so tricky to harvest successfully. But an effective harvest yields a great deal – not only hundreds of bales of thoroughly healthy food for cattle and sheep, but a spring and summer of ideal habitat for hundreds of species which are almost banished from conventional grassland. And it is beautiful – to see, to smell, to listen to.

At every turn and almost every week during the spring and summer, more benign connections and associations present themselves. A hay cut, however welcome, is a very abrupt change in habitat: at a stroke, a whole farm landscape changes, as the sward is cut. When the hay harvest was first begun again, butterflies ejected by the mass cutting of the fields had no alternative food source or much shelter. But remarkably, after three years of leaving most hedges to grow uncut, the flowering and complex growth of hedgerow plants provided a strikingly harbour and larder – as winged insects of all genera moved from field to hedge – within easy flying distance.

Across the farm, the integrity of the whole system is more and more apparent – stream banks become more stable, no longer punished by heavy grazing all year; silt levels decline and water quality improves. Gentler treatment of the fields improves soil structure, and together with a more complex vegetation pattern, more water is retained on the farm for longer, reducing flood risk much further downstream.

The expansion and thickening of hedges provide far greater shelter and protection for vulnerable animals – hedgehogs in particular – and allows September flocks of swallows and house martins to crowd the tops of the hedges rather than resorting to the mean linearity

of telegraph wires. The spring symphony of birdsong is gradually embellished – the music of garden warbler, pied flycatcher, yellow hammer and redstart returning, sometimes after many years. Across the farm, the increasingly individual character of fields and hedges emerges from a green haze of uniformity.

Not everything improves; there are false dawns, failures, unexpected disappointments. Alas, the complexity of a landscape holds many unresolved problems and frustrations. There is a huge amount to understand and to learn. But the overall effect of the changes we are lucky enough to be able to bring continually reinforces a sense of place. There is a joy in the renewal of long, long-established associations between land, weather, wildlife and farming. The love of and loyalty to place we feel on this small patch of ordinary traditional farmland helps to explain how much greater and more consequential places like our wonderful Heath inspire such devotion. And why we are all determined to protect and enhance it, celebrating its almost miraculous loveliness all the while.



Ancient meadow: not so ancient tractors: access to small irregular fields with modern kit can be difficult



Children's Activities in the Library

As well as a huge selection of children's books to borrow, your local library in Keats Grove has a range of activities and events for children

Regular weekly activities during term time:

Rhyme-time with Sasha: Tuesdays & Fridays at 11am, for babies/toddlers & carers.

Music with Magda: Tuesdays 4–4:45 pm & Wednesdays 10-15 – 11am, for babies/toddlers & carers

Chess with Nela: Saturdays 2.30–3.30pm, ages 4 and over

Ballet Story-Time with Lucy: Wednesdays 2–2.30pm, ages 18 months & carers

Throughout the year

We offer one-off activities such as puppet shows, magic shows, art workshops, & creative writing workshops



For news of upcoming children's events, join our Family Mailing List by emailing us at keatscommunitylibrary@gmail.com

Follow us on social media: Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook

A warm safe space for everyone

Keats Community Library, 10A Keats Grove, NW3 2RR ☎ 0207 431 1266

Burgh House & Hampstead Museum

There's always something to enjoy at Burgh House!

Step inside our beautiful Queen Anne house to explore our exhibitions, enjoy a slice of cake from our Café, or simply take in the atmosphere of one of Hampstead's most treasured historic building and exhibition galleries.

Don't miss your chance to see our exhibitions 'Helen Oxenbury: Illustrating the Land of Childhood' and 'Victorian Idylls: Kate Greenaway and Helen Allingham' – both finishing on Sunday 14 December 2025.

Keep an eye on our website and social media channels for details of our lively programme of events – exhibitions and concerts, to talks and family activities, there's something for everyone to enjoy! Look out for our Curator's Christmas Cracker (Talk and Object Session), showcasing Christmas themed items from our collection, taking place on Wednesday 3 December.



**BURGH
HOUSE**
Art. Events. History

Plan your visit: www.burghouse.org.uk/home

Follow us on social media:



www.instagram.com/burghhouse1704



www.facebook.com/BurghHouse1704/#

Heath Walks: 2025–2026

Walks are normally held on the first Sunday of every month except January. Many start from Burgh House, New End Square. London NW3 1LT – 10 minutes walk from Hampstead Tube Station

For map see www.burghouse.org.uk

NB: *Parking is difficult locally, especially on fine weekends; the West Heath car park (behind Jack Straw's Castle) is more likely to have spaces than the East Heath car park.*

Advance booking not required except where indicated; simply turn up at meeting place 5–10 minutes before the start times. Walks last approximately two hours. They do not necessarily follow made-up paths, so you are recommended to wear suitable footwear as conditions may be rough or muddy

The walks are now FREE but you will be encouraged to become a member of the Society – one of England's oldest and most respected conservation charities – if you are not one already

Children are always welcome so long as they are suitably shod, can walk reasonable distances and are accompanied by an adult taking full responsibility for them

Further information from the walks organiser, Tereza Pultarova

mobile: 0777 6649163 or email: hhs.walks@gmail.com

Further walks will be announced in the next Newsletter. Details of walk programmes will be available on the Society's website:

www.HeathandHampstead.org.uk

✕ @HandHSocHeath

2025

Sunday 2 November 10.30 am (meet at **Parliament Hill Bandstand**). **How will the Heath Respond to Climate Change?** Led by Jeff Waage, Society Trustee, and Jonathan Meares, City of London's Head of Conservation

Sunday 7 December 10.30 am (meet at **Parliament Hill Bandstand**). **Known and Unknown Landmarks of the East Heath** from the bandstand to Kenwood House with Jeska Harrington-Gould, Heath Sub-Committee member

2026

Sunday 1 February 10.00 am (meet at the entrance to the **Kenwood Walled Garden**, opposite the Stable Block). Explore the **Hidden History of the Heath** with Hampstead historian Micheal Hammerson, Heath Sub-Committee member

Sunday 1 March (meeting point and time to be specified). **Explore Past and Present of Development on and around the Heath** with Zander Goss, Heath Sub-Committee member. The brand-new walk will take you through the history of houses that are and those that weren't, and the conservation initiatives that stopped some projects in their tracks

