

The first Amwell Society window-box competition

We're hoping to fill the Amwell area with even more flowers than usual this year so we're announcing the first Amwell Society window box competition. It is open to all residents living within the Amwell Triangle. Flowers, herbs and fruits and even vegetables can all be grown in window boxes and we hope that you will be inspired to create something colourful, scented, sculptural and even edible



A pretty spring window-box seen in Great Percy Street

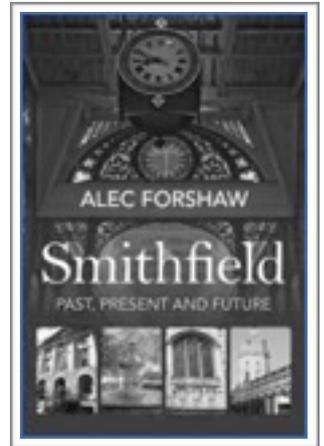
The window boxes will be judged before the Amwell Summer Fête. The judges are committee members Joanna Ward, Sally Hull and Camilla Jenssen. They will be looking out for window boxes of note and encouraging those who have not entered the competition to do so. If you see an especially lovely or clever window-box display by a neighbour or friend, let the judges know. Enter or nominate by sending your name and address to Joanna at joward001@icloud.com

Winners will be announced at the Summer Fête on 1 July with The wonderful prizes are to be donated by local businesses around Amwell Street. You can see more details on our website.

The Amwell Society AGM Tuesday 15 May at Clerkenwell Parochial School

We are pleased to announce the AGM will take place at Clerkenwell Parochial School again. The school was founded in 1700 and has recently become an academy. The school's head is now Amanda Szewczyk-Radley.

After the business of the AGM the AGM Talk will be given by Alec Forshaw. Alec worked in local government from 1972 until 2007 most notably in Islington where he was a constant supporter of the Amwell Society and our objectives. Alec is the author of numerous books, including *Brussels Art Nouveau*, *The Markets of London*, *1970s London* and *New City: Contemporary Architecture in the City of London*. Alec's AGM talk will mirror his book *Smithfield Past and Present* and will highlight the exciting forthcoming plans for Smithfield which will materialise in the coming years following the opening of Crossrail. **The school hall will be open from 6.30pm. The meeting will begin at 7.00 and the talk will commence at about 7.45.**



Amwell Summer Fete

We're planning an extra special Summer Fete in Amwell Street this year on **Sunday 1 July**. If you have an idea for a stall, a competition, for acoustic music [accordion, folk violin, banjo or singing] let us know. We want to concentrate on *local* and neighbourly contributions so no commercial stalls please. The ever popular Dog Show will take place. What about the cats?

King's Cross Road - a gripe

Many Amwell Society members must use King's Cross Road to reach the tube and main-line station at King's Cross, as well as the numerous bus stops. For a long time now the London Borough of Camden has not provided the many small traders in the road with effective commercial rubbish receptacles. The result is that from Wharton Street to Pentonville Road there are daily piles of refuse, food waste, recyclable material [cardboard and so on] which encourages fly-tipping of all kinds. If you dislike the mess and if it depresses you please write to Camden. environmental@camden.gov.uk street/678114 If you type in Kings Cross Road [without the apostrophe] the directory doesn't recognise the street so be sure to include the all important apostrophe.

Occasional Amwell events



The committee invites any members who have an idea for and would be prepared to organise an event to let us know. An event could be strongly Amwell orientated or not...a meeting on a contemporary topic, a trip to a museum or gallery or a guided walk would all be welcome. Being sociable and celebrating where we live is a positive part of neighbourhood life. Ideas to info@amwellsociety.org.uk

**TRIPP IS OUR LOCAL ART
GALLERY AT
59 AMWELL STREET
TRIPP ALONG.**

Down under

On Saturday 17 March committee member, Peadar Sionoid, organised an excellent Amwell Society visit to the newly opened Postal Museum in Phoenix Place on the Camden side of the Mount Pleasant Post Office site. The visit included an inspection of the underground railway that served London from 1927 until 2003. Members were able to ride in the small mail trucks on a circular route of the 2ft [810mm] gauge system. The original line ran from the Paddington District Sorting Office in the west to the Eastern District Sorting Office at Whitechapel in the east, a distance of 6.5 miles [10.5 km]. It had eight stations, the largest of which was beneath Mount Pleasant. By 2003 only three stations remained in use because the sorting offices above had been relocated including the all-important central office in King Edward Street near St Paul's. That grand building is now occupied by a finance house but outside is a statue to Rowland Hill, the founder of the first modern postal system and the inventor of the postage stamp. The new museum is well worth a visit but we were very sorry to find that, while you can buy stamps there, you cannot post a card to yourself, a friend or relation to mark the occasion.

Thanks go to Peadar for arranging the visit and also a successful follow-up lunch at Cafe Belgo at the Crowne Plaza Hotel afterwards.



A message from our Chairman, Paul Thornton



It is now 4 years since Clerkenwell Fire Station closed and was declared an Asset of Community Value at the Amwell Society's request. Questions to the Mayor, Sadiq Khan, about what is happening to it, have fallen on deaf ears. I have today written to the Islington Tribune to express our outrage that a 26,000 sq. ft building that could provide homes for 100+ Londoners is allowed to stand empty for so long – especially at a time when Councils are being pressed to approve ever more dense housing developments.

Most members will have received numerous communications about GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). This is an EU-wide (even post-Brexit) regulation to protect personal data from misuse. The Amwell Society only collects data necessary to provide services to our members (email addresses etc). Nevertheless we are subject to GDPR and will shortly be publishing our Privacy Policy on our website.

Please do come along to the AGM at Clerkenwell Parochial School on Tuesday 15 May as possible. The talk to be given by Alec Forshaw is bound to be lively, informative and given with great command of the subject. Smithfield is set to change and it's sure to have an impact on the Amwell area - a positive one, I hope. We provide glasses of wine as well as soft drinks and snacks. The AGM is always a great way to meet neighbours and to remind ourselves of the great work that has been achieved by the Society over an incredible 46 years. There is no doubt in my mind that the area where we live would not be the same without the energy and commitment of committee members, past and present.

Finally, when walking up Amwell Street or along Great Percy Street from mid-April, keep your eyes skinned for something noteworthy on the wall of Browning's Garage....

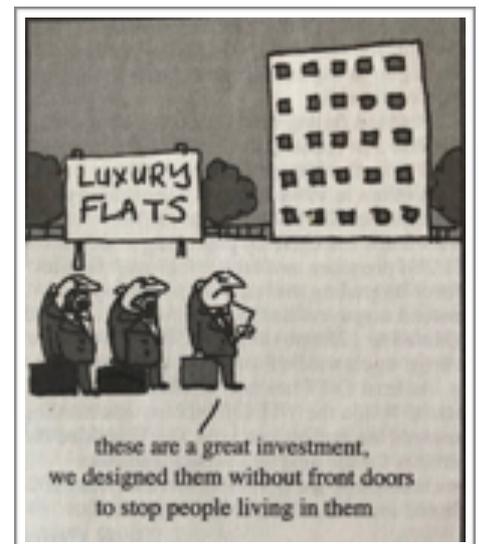
All houses have many stories.

Here is a photo showing an example of how many New River Company houses were built by different builders at different times. Note the different colours of the bricks, how the stucco is made to join and the different window heights. **Read Alain Head's article on page 4.**



Mount Pleasant Forum

The Forum has a new, smart website to aid it with its continuing work on the Mount Pleasant and surrounding areas. The Forum put up a good case for its inspiring, alternative proposal - Community Right to Build - that challenged the Taylor Wimpey proposal for the site which the developers have bought for £190m. We were told that the Forum's case was rejected because it didn't include sufficient parking places needed by the potential new residents on the site. Have a look at www.mountpleasantforum.org.uk to keep in touch with the development which is set to be mammoth.



Cartoon from Private Eye

All houses have many stories.

Alain Head, our honorary consultant architect writes:

Someone has asked me what I meant by 'every building has a story'. Here are few stories.

The most noticeable thing is how many Amwell Street buildings seem to have new brickwork on the upper levels. Why is this? Well, you have to go back to how the houses were built. Cost was always an important issue in house-building and it has been so for a very long time. With our houses, the bricks came from the clay literally under our feet but it was a clay that produced bricks of varying colours depending on its mineral content. The best yellow bricks were picked out of the kiln and reserved for the front elevations but the more common reddish purple bricks were deemed second rate and used for party and the rear walls. Not only were those bricks inferior but often, they were laid by less skilled tradesmen to keep labour costs down with the better bricklayers being retained for the face-work. The result was that often there was not a great bond between the party walls and the front elevations that were built later, meaning that there was little restraint to the front elevation, an elevation that was quite tall and slender. In addition the front elevations were generally just a facing with an inner leaf of cheaper bricks and although the brickwork's Flemish bond has lots of header bricks that tie the wall together, because of cost, these were often cut in half to save money and didn't tie in. So when you add the walls' slenderness, the insufficient tie-in and the fact that the bricks were laid in fairly soft pliable lime mortar, there isn't much to stop the walls bowing and that is just what they did, particularly at upper levels. So the areas of new brickwork that we see are where walls have failed and been replaced.

But not every patch of new brickwork tells the same story: the yellow band that surrounds the top of Lloyd's Dairy may have been due to poor construction but it reminds us that only 25 years ago the house was ringed by a huge rendered frieze with the words LLOYD'S DAIRY and DAIRY painted in letters 3ft high. That was lost in the much needed renovation.

Looking at how the houses join up, there are other signs that show how they were built.

This dodgy detail of a string course that doesn't line up reminds us that the area was built bit-by-bit. Contracts were let to develop a few houses at a time and often these were then sublet to different builders. The out-of-line string course demonstrates that the two houses were built by different people or at different times and that the builders didn't co-ordinate their work.

Another odd detail can be seen over the old bakery on the northern corner of River Street where the windows are shortened at first floor level. All shops on Amwell Street probably had the same type of Georgian shopfronts - a glazed bay that fitted in neatly with the building above. The bakery must have had the same but at sometime a bigger fascia was installed. This came in front of the windows above so they were just cut down to fit. Probably the upper sash is the original size while the lower one was shortened. In those days when materials were expensive and labour cheap, a carpenter was hired to shorten the windows on site.

Many railings have been added recently too with the opening up of the basements under the shops. Some went in under the LBI planning radar and show themselves by having forged steel heads - like daggers - but the more recent conversions have replica cast-iron heads. Nice, but you can tell they are modern. The original uprights were cast iron and if you look carefully you can see they are fluted on the sides. The new ones are plain square steel.

Finally, there is one house on the street that has blue stucco. Why? In the early 20th century, when most of the houses were owned by the New River Company, they were painted different colours. Amwell Street was blue, River Street was grey, Claremont Square may have been brown. Each street had a different colour. The houses weren't all repainted at the same time so as the paint faded, there were differences of colour that gave these streets a special atmosphere. This area was unique in London. When LBI took over the properties, it continued the tradition for about 30 years. Until 2008 - 9, when it was decided to repaint those properties the cream or white colours that you see today. Amwell Street now looks just like any other Georgian/Victorian London street.

Our heritage was literally painted over!